

HUMANITY FULLY ALIVE: HEALING AND MANAGEMENT OF TRAUMA
THROUGH THE FLOW EXPERIENCE FACILITATED BY SPIRITUAL FORMATION
PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

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The primary issue this dissertation addresses is how spiritual formation practices (specifically prayer, daily writing/journaling, and light imagery meditation) that produce the psychological condition called ‘flow’ to the management and alleviation of symptoms related to trauma, specifically post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The problem is that while much research and literature already focuses on trauma and the recovery from trauma, only a small amount of research actually focuses on the contribution of spiritual formation practices to the management and alleviation of the symptoms of trauma. In the same vein, while much research has been carried out on the psychological condition of ‘flow,’ only a small amount of literature focuses on the contribution of flow experiences to the treatment of trauma. And no literature has been written that sheds light on spiritual practices as a means of flow in treating symptoms related to trauma. Qualitative research for this dissertation is in the form of case studies. Prominent trauma experts are included to define trauma, the symptoms and challenges that trauma presents, and the requirements needed to heal from trauma. With Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as the primary developer of the study of flow, this dissertation explores the psychological aspects of flow, the conditions required for it, its results, and how flow can be utilized in the healing of and recovery from trauma. Spiritual formation practices of prayer and meditation are described as supports for healing and recovery. Case studies of four mystics are

included as sources of data—St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill—documenting how spiritual practices and flow helped these mystics in their healing of and recovery from trauma.

Keywords trauma, healing, recovery, flow, spirituality, spiritual formation, spiritual practices, mysticism, mystical experience, suffering

To my mother, Mary L. Ruiz

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Introduction

Problem to be Addressed

The primary issue this dissertation addresses is how spiritual formation practices (in the form of prayer), movement based practices (in terms of daily writing/journaling), and meditative practices (in the form of light imagery) that produce the psychological condition called ‘flow’ contribute to the management and alleviation of symptoms related to trauma, specifically post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While much research and literature focuses on trauma and the recovery from trauma, few research studies have focused on the contribution of spiritual formation practices to the management and alleviation of the symptoms of trauma. In the same vein, much research has been done on the psychological condition of ‘flow,’ and few of those studies focus on the contribution of flow experiences to the treatment of trauma. And no existing literature sheds light on spiritual practices as a means of flow in treating symptoms related to trauma.

Thesis

As this dissertation will argue, spiritual formation practices that include prayer and meditation, along with activities that are movement based, such as writing/journaling, induce the flow experience and in turn assist in the management and recovery from symptoms of trauma, specifically PTSD.

Summary of Argument

Chapter One presents the definition of trauma, followed by the definition of recovery from trauma. I begin with the DSM 5’s discussion of post traumatic stress disorder. I summarize

the work of several experts in trauma; then turn to Judith Lewis Herman's observations on the meaning of trauma. Next, I introduce Dr. Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth's edited work on traumatic stress and its effects on the body, mind, and society. Van der Kolk describes trauma in terms of its psychology and physiology. He is also the founder of The Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute.

In Chapter Two, I observe flow and the activities that induce the flow experience. In this section, I also introduce flow and its role in healing from trauma. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi named the concept of flow. Flow is that experience that occurs when a person's actions are in line with their desires and cognitive processes or thinking.¹ He suggests that many conditions foster flow and that flow has clear goals every step of the way. A person knows exactly what she has to do the very next moment. Each move connects to the next move. Examples of a person whose actions are "in flow" include engaging in any learned complex activity, whether that is participating in a sport, playing a musical instrument, or skillfully handling equipment. Second, flow provides immediate, built-in feedback for the agent in their action. As Duke Ellington said, "My reward is hearing what I've done...I can hear it immediately." Ellington gets immediate feedback both from his own ears and from the other people who respond as they see him and hear his music. Third and finally, there is a balance between challenges and skills.² Challenges too high cause anxiety, too low and they result in boredom. Without adequate skills, the actor loses interest. But apply good skills to good challenges and the resultant flow takes one above

¹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 29.

² Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Flow" (Lecture, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA, March 24, 2010).

the level of ordinary life.³ An example of this can be found in the game of chess. For champions in a chess tournament, the more challenging the opponent, the greater the enjoyment.⁴

When all the conditions for flow are present, a person is intensely focused, pays full attention to the activity, and is not distracted. The person is not self-conscious, but on the contrary is completely involved in the experience, even losing awareness of time.⁵ “When a person’s entire being is stretched in the full functioning of body and mind, whatever one does becomes worth doing for its own sake; living becomes its own justification. In the harmonious focusing of physical and psychic energy, life finally comes into its own.”⁶ There is full integration of the human spirit in flow.

These attributes make flow beneficial for use in healing and recovery from trauma. Richard D. Logan’s article titled “The ‘Flow Experience’ in Solitary Ordeals,” teaches us that the flow experience can be utilized as a coping method not only after trauma, but also actually at the time of the traumatic event. Notes Logan, “One characteristic of individuals who manage to survive situations of prolonged hardship (captivity, isolation, trek) is that they arrange their situations and their activities so as to create the elements of flow experiences.”⁷ Flow activities can help people pass the time in the very midst of trauma.

In Chapter Three I turn to an examination of spirituality and spiritual formation, followed by spiritual practices and their place in our lives. Next come spiritual formation and meditation

³ Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 30.

⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, “Flow.”

⁵ Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 31.

⁶ Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 31-32.

⁷ Richard D. Logan, “The ‘Flow Experience’ in Solitary Ordeals,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 25 (1985): 80.

practices as types of flow practices. Finally, I discuss spiritual practices and their role in healing and recovery from trauma.

Among the theories of spirituality and spiritual formation, I look at those of Mel Lawrenz, Maxie Dunham, Roger S. Gottlieb, Michael Downey, and Michael Cox. In the area of spiritual practices, I draw upon the works of Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and Teresa Blythe. Each author has suggestions of spiritual practices and ways in which they propose the place of spiritual practices for our lives. The works were selected for their various understandings of spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual practices. Spiritual practices offer one type of flow in the recovery from trauma. Linda Mayorga Miller, Terry Lynn Gall and Lise Corbeil observe the roles played by prayer and sacred objects when individuals are presented with significant life stressors. Mary Jo Barrett has broadened the work of healing from trauma to include a spiritual depth to the process.

My criterion for inclusion or exclusion of material in this study was the pertinence of the subject matter for healing from trauma.

Chapter Four of the dissertation will explore the figures of St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill as examples of individuals who articulated their own experience of recovery from trauma. I provide an overview of their lives and then show how their suffering was alleviated through their spiritual formation practices, how that practice created the flow experience, and consequently how it affected their relationship with the Sacred. That these figures are revered as noted mystics of their churches determined my inclusion of them in this project.

My research is based on the case studies of the four mystics; their trauma and healing provide the data for my findings. This process will show why I think that the spiritual formation

practices that include meditation, along with activities that are movement based, induce the flow experience and in turn assist in the management and recovery from symptoms of trauma, specifically PTSD.

Finally, Chapter Five will describe several spiritual formation practices that induce flow that have specific promise for the management and recovery from trauma. I explore the movement-based flow practice of daily writing/journaling. Daily writing/journaling is referred to as movement-based because of the physical movement of the hands that characterizes it. Daily writing/journaling is a specific type of journaling exercise Julia Cameron describes in which persons write their stream of consciousness, meaning that the writing is not premeditated or edited.⁸ The spiritual formation practices I have chosen to study are guided meditation in the form of light imagery and concurrent prayer/dialog with the Sacred. The light imagery is partly based on a grounding meditation.⁹ The prayer/dialog with the Sacred will follow a specific form of prayer that is suggested in St. Faustina's *Diary*.¹⁰ These practices likewise have the potential to induce the flow experience.

Chapter Five will describe why and how it is that the flow practices of prayer/meditation and writing/journaling can contribute to the management and alleviation of symptoms of trauma. This chapter will also contain the inclusion of theories that can address the enigma that is trauma and its counterpart—healing and the alleviation of trauma's symptoms.

⁸ Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2002), 9-18.

⁹ Michele Cempaka, "Grounding, Cleansing, Protection and Meditation," *Spirit Weaver Journeys*, <http://spiritweaverjourneys.com/grounding-cleansing-protection-meditation/>, accessed August 31, 2014.

¹⁰ Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul* (Stockbridge, MA: Marians of the Immaculate Conception, 1981), 358.

Flow experiences that are movement based and meditational can provide tools, hope, and healing for individuals by shedding light on the darkness that is part of the very nature of trauma. Here we see that the focus of the flow experience is primarily on the power and strength of the human spirit to move into the very depths of what it means to thrive. When humans thrive, they are living up to their fullest potential and, when this happens, they become humanity fully alive.

Chapter One

Trauma and Recovery

I have broken down this chapter into two parts. The first part concentrates on post traumatic stress disorder's challenges and what it means to heal from PTSD. I begin by describing post traumatic stress disorder and the effect it has on people in terms of symptoms and challenges. Finally, I will suggest what it is that healing from PTSD requires.

The second part of the chapter concentrates on specific scholarly articles on trauma as well as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder's criteria for post traumatic stress disorder. First, I turn to Duane Bidwell's article on a competency approach to healing. Second, I note Tedeschi and Calhoun's article that defines post traumatic growth. Third, I include the criteria that the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th edition) establishes for PTSD. Fourth, I note that James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead suggest that the emotions of wonder, joy, compassion, and hope can contribute to healing from the affects of trauma. Fifth, we see that Bessel A. Van Der Kolk, Lars Weisaeth, and Onno Van Der Hart conclude that there is a connection between culture, society, history, and politics and how people deal with traumatic stress. Sixth, that Raymond B. Flannery takes a stress management approach to learned helplessness. Seventh and finally, that George W. Burns uses positive psychology to teach clients what they can do to achieve happiness in their lives.

Part I
PTSD: How Experts Explain What It Is; How It Acts; How It Heals

Description/Definition of PTSD

This part of Chapter One helps us understand what we are dealing with when we use the words trauma and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In order to understand what it means to heal, we need to understand that which makes us ill. The experts allow us a great deal of comprehension and clarity on the subject.

In this section I describe how selected prominent trauma experts define trauma. These experts are Judith Herman, Peter A. Levine, Deborah A. Lee and Sophie James, Bessel van der Kolk, and Laurel Parnell. Judith Herman is Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School and Director of Training at the Victims of Violence Program at Cambridge Hospital. Peter A. Levine conducts training in Somatic Experiencing as a body-awareness approach to healing trauma around the world and in various indigenous cultures. Deborah A. Lee is a consultant clinical psychologist and is head of a national treatment center for PTSD in Berkshire, UK. She is also an honorary senior lecturer in clinical psychology at the University College London. Sophie James is a lawyer and writer. Bessel van der Kolk is the founder and medical director of the Trauma Center in Brookline, Massachusetts. Laurel Parnell is a clinical psychologist, teacher, and author. She presents at conferences in the United States and abroad. The experts bring us crucial information toward our understanding of trauma and recovery.

I begin with Judith Herman, who besides the positions listed above also practices at a feminist mental health clinic. She maintains that the symptoms of those persons who have

survived prolonged and repeated trauma tend to be more complex.¹¹ Her definition of complex post traumatic stress disorder includes:

1. A history of subjection to totalitarian control over a prolonged period (months to years). Examples include hostages, prisoners of war, concentration-camp survivors, and survivors of some religious cults. Examples also include those subjected to totalitarian systems in sexual and domestic life, including survivors of domestic battering, childhood physical or sexual abuse, and organized sexual exploitation.¹²

Herman's definition suggests that PTSD involves being subject to another's abuse that has been carried out over a long period of time. Judith Herman's work on trauma is central in the field of psychology.

Peter A. Levine is the developer of a body-awareness approach to healing trauma called Somatic Experiencing, as well as the founder of the Foundation for Human Enrichment. He has doctorates in medical biophysics and in psychology. Levine suggests that one of the primary reactions a person has when attacked or in danger is active defense. The person tries to dodge the attacker, defend herself by raising her arms in protection, runs away or fights if she feels she might elude or overpower the attacker, or if she is trapped. This is also known as the fight or flight response. The third typical response is immobilization. Ethologists refer to this paralysis as tonic immobility (TI). It is known as one of the three principle instinctive responses of reptiles and mammals when threatened by predators. It happens when active reactions are not enough to escape or remove the threat to life, as one would by fighting the attacker.¹³

Levine sums up these responses with the acronym, "the A, and four Fs": "Arrest (increased vigilance, scanning), Flight (try first to escape), Fight (if the animal or person is

¹¹ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 119.

¹² Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 121.

¹³ Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 48.

prevented from escaping), Freeze (fright – scared stiff) and Fold (collapse into helplessness).”¹⁴

Levine helps us understand natural responses to trauma. We can all see ourselves in the A and four Fs in terms of how we have responded in times of distress or trauma in our lives.

Deborah A. Lee is a pioneer in using compassion-focused therapy with those suffering from shame-based PTSD and complex trauma. She has written widely about the subject and has conducted clinical workshops both in North America and Europe. Her frequent writing partner is Sophie James, who practiced law for over ten years before she changed careers and became a writer, particularly for the self-help market. She is dedicated to increasing the accessibility of clinical research and practice for the general audience. Lee and James define trauma as, “the emotional shock we feel following an extremely stressful or traumatic event.”¹⁵ A traumatic event can occur to the extent that the life you once had is no longer known. Lee and James’s definition of trauma allow us to understand trauma and stress by way of trauma’s after-effects.

PTSD develops as the result of a traumatic event. Lee and James identify PTSD as, “a recognized diagnosis, which put simply, means that you are suffering from known symptoms from which it can be deduced that you are suffering from PTSD.”¹⁶ PTSD symptoms include three separate categories: First, a person might re-experience the traumatic event over and over through flashbacks.¹⁷ “Flashbacks are reoccurring and intrusive images of the event that you find painful and upsetting. You can find images popping up in your mind when you don’t want

¹⁴ Levine, *Unspoken*, 48.

¹⁵ Deborah A. Lee and Sophie James, *The Compassionate-Mind Guide to Recovering from Trauma and PTSD: Using Compassion-Focused Therapy to Overcome Flashbacks, Shame, Guilt, and Fear* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2011), 3.

¹⁶ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 9.

¹⁷ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 9.

them to.”¹⁸ Second, a person might deliberately avoid memories that are traumatic.¹⁹ A person might seek to avoid people and situations that remind them of the trauma.²⁰ Third, there is the experience of hyperarousal or of being on your guard all of the time.²¹ As James and Lee note, “You may also suffer from poor concentration, irritability, and poor sleep. You may experience mood swings and high levels of anxiety because you are on guard and constantly looking out for danger.”²² These internal affects of PTSD may feel more or less intense at any given moment. This is the way affects of trauma can wreak havoc on a person’s life. This is why healing is so important. Healing may even lead to justice within the client in the way that the client should not have to live a life of continued suffering due to another person’s lack of humanity.

Bessel van der Kolk is not only the founder and medical director of the Trauma Center in Brookline, Massachusetts, but also a professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine and director of the National Complex Trauma Treatment Network. Van der Kolk suggests that what we know now is the pure and simple idea that those experiences that have overwhelmed us influence the most inward sensations we have and the relationship we have with our own physical reality, basically, our core selves.²³ He writes, “We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism

¹⁸ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 9.

¹⁹ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 9.

²⁰ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 9.

²¹ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 9.

²² Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 9.

²³ Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), 21.

manages to survive in the present.”²⁴ In his analysis, Van der Kolk proposes that when trauma happens, it affects a person’s entire way of being in the world. The entire person’s being is affected in trauma. The way we process our surroundings and the way our bodies react to everyday life are the remains of trauma.

Trauma is the outcome of what it means when there is “a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think.”²⁵ For the most part, it is not enough that victims of trauma are assisted in describing what they went through. Speaking about the traumatic events does not entirely change the hormonal and physical bodily responses that are automatic and are left with the scars that maintain feelings of hyper vigilance out of fear of being assaulted or violated.²⁶ Van der Kolk has found that, “For real change to take place, the body needs to learn that the danger has passed and to live in the reality of the present. Our search to understand trauma has led us to think differently not only about the structure of the mind but also about the processes by which it heals.”²⁷ He maintains that the body itself has its own sense of memory. When we learn more about trauma, we also learn what it means to heal from trauma.

Symptoms of PTSD

Herman includes trauma in terms of different kinds of changes within the survivors.²⁸ Examples of these changes include: Changes in emotion that are extreme as well as changes having to do with dissociation; changes in how you perceive yourself; changes in the way the

²⁴ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 21.

²⁵ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 21.

²⁶ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 21.

²⁷ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 21.

²⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 121.

survivor feels about the perpetrator; changes in how the survivor feels socially; changes in belief systems.²⁹ The changes that present themselves to people are true indicators of trauma. This is trauma's true dynamic in the life of the victim. Everything in the world is seen through the lens of the traumatic event. This is why it is so important to have hope and know that healing is possible. Herman holds that it is important to find words to define PTSD to recognize and give legitimacy to the experience of survivors.³⁰ When we give legitimacy to survivors, we set the stage for healing. Survivors need to know that they are respected and that they can recover their own healthy sense of self as well as the world around them.

According to Lee and James, primary symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks, avoidance, and being on one's guard. Flashbacks are upsetting memories of the traumatic event that present themselves when they are unwanted in the form of images, feelings, sensations, and sounds.³¹ Avoidance means separating yourself from anything that makes you think of the traumatic event.³² When someone feels like they are constantly on guard they can experience or have difficulty functioning normally.³³ Other frequently observed reactions related to trauma are, "feeling depressed or anxious, mood swings or feeling irritable, withdrawing from family and friends, feeling disconnected or numb, feelings of guilt or self-blame."³⁴ Symptoms of trauma can make you feel like you are not yourself, or the self that you were before the traumatic event. Trauma symptoms can interrupt your life in very drastic ways. The inner world gets so disrupted that the outer world, as in family, friends, and colleagues can be affected as well.

²⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 121.

³⁰ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 122.

³¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 122.

³² Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 10.

³³ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 10.

³⁴ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 10.

The effects of trauma can also include: difficulties with emotion control and/or an emotional response that is strong or overwhelming; suicidal thoughts; anger and irritability; impulsive or reckless behaviors such as driving at high speeds, gambling, stealing clothing or other items, or engaging in casual or unprotected sex; deliberate self harm; feeling isolated or numb; not remembering anything you have done (dissociation); reliving the traumatic event and trying to figure out why it occurred at all; helplessness or difficulty making plans; shame, guilt, self-blame; feeling in some way very different from others and feel damaged in some way; or feeling unable to live life the way others do. A person can experience separation from family and friends, with the result of feeling alone and misunderstood; feeling confused, and specifically having conflicted feelings toward the person that caused the hurt, perhaps because one still has a relationship with the person that did the harm; loss of or change in relationships with family, friends, or others; a sense of disillusion; a change in or loss of the faith or religious beliefs that they once held; feelings of meaninglessness of life; and feelings of hopelessness and despair.³⁵ The effects of trauma can make a distortion of how a person feels about themselves. Cognitive sensibilities can also be hampered by the traumatic event.

Dissociation is another way that trauma can affect a person. Dissociation is, “where our bodies are acting automatically and our minds are distracted ...Dissociation literally means ‘difficulties integrating information’ from the different parts of the mind.”³⁶ This can be a means of preventing the brain from becoming overwhelmed. The brain is having difficulty with integrating certain information, having to shut itself down in order to protect itself.³⁷ As Lee and James remind us, although troublesome, a positive aspect of dissociation is that it is there to help

³⁵ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 12-13.

³⁶ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 13.

³⁷ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 13.

take care of us and protect our mental states. But it is still important to work on healing trauma in our lives because dissociation prevents us from fully enjoying life.³⁸ Based on the above statements, healing can mean recovering full integration of the mind and body.

Signs of dissociation include having a misperception of time in terms of not being fully present to life including the passage of time, feeling out of touch with reality, feeling separated from your body, discovering you have gone shopping and cannot recall the experience.³⁹ In dissociation, a person can go through the motions of life without being truly attentive to their own self or people around them.

Healing Process/Ways To Heal PTSD

This section will describe healing processes and ways people can heal from trauma, especially PTSD. Herman suggests that what happens predominantly with traumatized people is disconnection from other people and disempowerment. So, new connections with others and empowerment are key components of recovery. Recovery cannot happen in isolation; it can only occur in relationship with others. It is in those relationships with others that those traumatized can repair and heal psychologically, where there are wounds from trauma.⁴⁰ Those wounds “include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy. Just as these capabilities are formed in relationships with other people, they must be reformed in such relationships.”⁴¹ Relationships are key to the recovery process.

³⁸ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 13.

³⁹ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 14.

⁴⁰ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 133.

⁴¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 133.

Empowerment is essential. The survivor must be the author of her or his own recovery.⁴² “Others may offer advice, support, assistance, affection, and care, but not cure.”⁴³ No matter how well-intended others may be, any intervention that renders the survivor powerless does not ultimately assist the survivor’s recovery, even if it is done with the survivor’s best interest in mind.⁴⁴ Often such intervention occurs best in a therapeutic relationship.

The relationship that occurs in therapy is unique. First, its singular objective is to assist in the recovery process of the client.⁴⁵ “In the furtherance of this goal, the therapist becomes the patient’s ally, placing all the resources of her knowledge, skill, and experience at the patient’s disposal.”⁴⁶ Second, the relationship between the therapist and client is out of the ordinary in the sense that there is a contractual agreement in relation to power differentials. The patient seeks therapy for help in dealing with trauma, along with the care it requires to assist in the healing process. The client enters the therapist-client relationship knowing full well that the therapist holds more power and status in the relationship. Inevitably, feelings of parental dependence upon the therapist arise in the client. This dynamic, also called transference, brings attention to and intensifies the power differential, resulting in the client becoming vulnerable to further abuse.⁴⁷ Vulnerability can also aid in healing and recovery as the client brings her truest self into therapy. Vulnerability is a threat to the client when the therapist takes advantage of that vulnerability.

According to Herman, there are three stages in the recovery process. The goal of the first stage is to establish an environment of safety; of the second, to enable remembrance and

⁴² Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 133.

⁴³ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 133.

⁴⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 133.

⁴⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 134.

⁴⁶ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 134.

⁴⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 134-135.

mourning to happen; and of the third, to achieve reconnection with ordinary life. The stages often have to be repeated, for as life circumstances change, as they will, issues tend to reappear.⁴⁸ However it is evidence of productive therapy when a patient is able to go through earlier stages of trauma where once they proved to be debilitating.⁴⁹ The stages are an important guide to progress in therapy. The stages tell us what steps need to be taken to continue healing.

Establishing safety is the essential first step in the process of recovery. The victim needs to feel safe in order to begin to heal and move on in the therapeutic process. The patient can spend days, weeks, or years in this stage of recovery, often depending on the severity and duration of the trauma.⁵⁰ Safety helps the body and mind to be calm and begin the healing process. Safety signals the brain that the traumatic event is over.

The second stage of recovery is remembrance and mourning. This is where the patient speaks of their personal trauma story as a way of gaining greater integration. The trauma memory may seem to have no words and seem fuzzy or foggy and unclear.⁵¹ “One observer describes the trauma story in its untransformed state as ‘prenarrative.’ It does not develop or progress in time, and it does not reveal the storyteller’s feelings or interpretation of events.”⁵² It often happens that when the client tells her story, she is empowered. She is empowered by her own words. There is ownership of the traumatic experience ironically in the way that she no longer has to keep it hidden within. Once the experience is shared, it no longer has as much power as it did before verbalizing it.

⁴⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 155.

⁴⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 155.

⁵⁰ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 159-160.

⁵¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

⁵² Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

At this stage of therapy, safety continues to be important. It takes wisdom to know when to take a pause in eliciting such memories, and when to continue the therapy process. Indeed, both the therapist and patient must continually check in with each other as to the pace of the therapy.⁵³ It is a difficult stage, and “[t]he patient should also expect that she will not be able to function at the highest level of her ability, or even at her usual level, during this time. ...[Thus, a]ctive uncovering work should not be undertaken at times when immediate life crises claim the patient’s attention or when other important goals take priority.”⁵⁴ Prudence falls on the shoulders of both therapist and client. Both need to be aware that at times, limits need to be drawn in therapy.

Where there is trauma, there is loss of different kinds. The loss can be a person’s psychological state, loss of the relationship with the body the patient previously had if it has been violated, and loss of people, whether family, friends, or community.⁵⁵ Loss is at the cornerstone of trauma. But because loss is known, we know recovery.

In the third stage of recovery, which is reconnection, the patient concentrates on her future. How she views her life in terms of her trauma is now different. It is now time to start anew. New relationships are formed, along with new and healthier way of thinking about her life. At this stage, the patient takes on a sense of agency in her life again.⁵⁶

The majority of survivors resolve to deal with their trauma within the closed unit of their own lives. Yet, there are some that opt to bring it into public and society.⁵⁷ Often “[t]hese survivors recognize a political or religious dimension in their misfortune and discover that they

⁵³ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 176.

⁵⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 176.

⁵⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 188.

⁵⁶ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 96.

⁵⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207.

can transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action.”⁵⁸ Social action can be a source of empowerment to the victim. With her renewed strength and recovery, she can affect change.

Trauma breaks the connections between the individual and the community. In connection with groups of people, the clients realize that they can heal by connecting with others and regaining their own humanity, self worth, and their own sense of self.⁵⁹ “Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity.”⁶⁰ The dynamic of sharing trauma is part of the healing process. Vitality is restored through common experience. Bonds that are formed that increase strength.

There are groups for each stage of recovery. In each stage, there are different elements of each kind of group based upon their therapeutic task. Those elements are time orientation, focus, membership, boundaries, cohesion, conflict tolerance, time limit, and structure. Example groups for stage one, safety, are twelve-step programs. Example groups for stage two, remembrance and mourning, are survivor groups. Example groups for stage three, reconnection, are interpersonal psychotherapy groups.⁶¹

According to Levine, therapy should involve safety and a certain amount of prudence when working with trauma survivors. There must be prudence in the ability to maintain that safe environment and at the same time address the experienced trauma through recalling the traumatizing event in small doses instead of experiencing it all at once. The client must be able to

⁵⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207.

⁵⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 214.

⁶⁰ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 214.

⁶¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 218.

feel safe from past trauma as well as from feeling overwhelmed when talking about the trauma. Trauma is a physical, biological reality. The healing of trauma requires the client to get in touch with their own physical sensations and bodies.⁶² Levine notes the typical fashion of doing therapy in which both the client and therapist sit on chairs may not be the best possible option for those who are trauma sufferers. Due to the trauma, sufferers tend to be numb to their bodily sensations, so they must redevelop body awareness.⁶³ “Since sitting requires little proprioceptive and kinesthetic information to maintain an erect posture, the body easily becomes absent, disappearing from its owner.”⁶⁴ To remedy the dissociation, a client can stand instead of sitting down. Standing requires more body awareness to maintain balance. It prompts the client to be more bodily aware as she or he processes unpleasant sensations and feelings.⁶⁵ Another way to create such awareness is by inviting the client to sit on an appropriately sized gymnastics ball:

Since balancing on a ball requires making multiple adjustments to maintain equilibrium, not only does it help one to be in touch with internal sensations due to the feedback from this pliable surface, but in addition, exploration in muscle awareness, grounding, centering, protective reflexes and core strength bring a whole new dimension to developing a body consciousness.⁶⁶

Levine helps clients get in touch with physical sensations of the body and in this way he assists in the healing process.

The therapist uses a process intended to get the client in touch with her body. She learns to pay attention to her body from foot to head, to find her center of gravity, to listen to her breathing, to become aware of what causes inner tension and notice how she responds to tension. Through this process, the client is learning to know, listen to, and accept her body as a valuable

⁶² Levine, *Unspoken*, 74-75.

⁶³ Levine, *Unspoken*, 116.

⁶⁴ Levine, *Unspoken*, 116.

⁶⁵ Levine, *Unspoken*, 116.

⁶⁶ Levine, *Unspoken*, 116-117.

conveyor of information.⁶⁷ “This type of movement requires a fairly sophisticated proprioceptive ability (joint position) and sense of muscle tension (kinesthesia). As your client practices this, have her imagine a plumb line from her center down to the floor between her feet. Finally, have her notice how this line moves with her gentle swaying.”⁶⁸ These centered awareness exercises will prepare the client for the physical awareness exercises.⁶⁹

The physical awareness exercise will help the client develop an experience of healthy aggression. In this exercise, the client and therapist take turns pushing and receiving pressure that is exchanged through the use of force through holding hands palm to palm.⁷⁰

Another activity that can help people with PTSD is based on the idea there is a latent active response that their bodies have that can help them at those times of paralysis. That active latent response of running and escaping is still inside their bodies. This exercise capitalizes on that reality. The client basically runs in place while seated on a chair. In this exercise, the client needs to remain focused on body sensations while engaging with the activity rather than just making mechanical movements or just demonstrating the running movement.⁷¹ The idea is that at a later time, when the client is sharing traumatic events and feels paralyzed or entrapped, the therapist can ask the client to take a moment from sharing and bring their attention back to their legs.⁷²

⁶⁷ Levine, *Unspoken*, 117.

⁶⁸ Levine, *Unspoken*, 117.

⁶⁹ Levine, *Unspoken*, 117.

⁷⁰ Levine, *Unspoken*, 118-119.

⁷¹ Levine, *Unspoken*, 119.

⁷² Levine, *Unspoken*, 119.

An additional exercise that can help people with PTSD is to use a Tibetan chant that Levine modified.⁷³ Levine offers a model that focuses on the voo sound. The client makes this sound with a series of exhalations. The exercise is meant to help a client restore a sense of peace and calm.⁷⁴

A final exercise that can help clients with the management of symptoms of distress is Jin Shin Jyutsu. Jin Shin Jyutsu is characterized by a system of energy flows in the body and known as a technique of self-help. These exercises can help with self compassion and distress arousal (the hugging exercise) and with relaxation (arm/hand positioning).⁷⁵

According to Lee and James, having a compassionate mind is another way to heal. The components of a compassionate mind include motivation, attention/imagery, thinking/reasoning, imagery, behavior, and emotions. Compassionate motivation alleviates and is a preventive measure for our own suffering and the suffering of others.⁷⁶ “Compassionate wisdom aids motivation because we begin to recognize that avoidance, blaming and shaming, and our self-criticism actually add to our suffering rather than alleviating it. As we gain these insights we become naturally motivated to try as best we can to lessen and heal our suffering.”⁷⁷ Compassionate attention shifts our focus from the traumatized mindset that there is danger all around us to the reality that we are now safe and still alive.⁷⁸ Compassionate thinking enables us to take a step back, and then carefully consider things, while remaining objective and doing this

⁷³ Levine, *Unspoken*, 125-126.

⁷⁴ Levine, *Unspoken*, 126.

⁷⁵ Levine, *Unspoken*, 127.

⁷⁶ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 80.

⁷⁷ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 80.

⁷⁸ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 81.

with care. Compassionate thinking assists us in the way that we are able to observe our own suffering and the reasons that we suffer.⁷⁹

Compassionate images are those images that give us a sense of support, understanding, are kind, and encourage us. To be critical of ourselves and produce images that are frightful is exceedingly easy to do when we have experienced trauma.⁸⁰ Compassionate behavior is about how it is that we can develop new behaviors that assist us in dealing with those things that have caused us to suffer.⁸¹ Compassionate emotions are associated with feeling positive.⁸² When negatively perceived emotions such as fear and anger are experienced, people attempt to mitigate those feelings through self-soothing dynamics. A sense of self agency helps to ignite that part of the person that is seeking to be a self-soother in their journey toward healing.⁸³

I move now from Lee to the writings of van der Kolk, who suggests that trauma takes away a person's sense of agency. The recovery task is about retrieving the sense of owning our bodies and minds, basically ourselves. This means accepting what is known and what is physically felt, and not becoming overtaken, angered, feeling a sense of shame, or collapsing.⁸⁴ Some aspects of recovery include the ability to find peace through finding methods of centering or grounding, learning ways to be fully present and in the moment, and being entirely honest with yourself.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 81.

⁸⁰ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 82.

⁸¹ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 83.

⁸² Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 83.

⁸³ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 83-84.

⁸⁴ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 203.

⁸⁵ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 203-204.

Van der Kolk suggests six main strategies to implement in the healing process, along with language and writing. They are EMDR⁸⁶ (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), yoga, self-leadership, creating structures, neurofeedback, and finally, communal rhythms and theater. Each strategy has been scientifically proven to assist in the management and healing process for people with PTSD.

The first of these strategies, EMDR, is where the therapist moves their index finger slowly and repeatedly back and forth, from right to left, at a distance of approximately one foot from the client's eyes.⁸⁷ The eye movements mimic those we make when we are in a state of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep and are dreaming.⁸⁸ Stickgold asserts that,

If the bilateral stimulation of EMDR can alter brain states in a manner similar to that seen during REM sleep, then there is now good evidence that EMDR should be able to take advantage of sleep-dependent processes, which may be blocked or ineffective in PTSD sufferers, to allow effective memory processing and trauma resolution.⁸⁹

Yoga practices predominantly include three components. They are “breath practices (pranayama), stretches or postures (asanas), and meditation.”⁹⁰ Different yoga practices observe various combinations of those three components in terms of intensity and concentration.⁹¹ Through the use of yoga, patients with alexithymia, where a person has difficulty identifying what is going on inside their bodies or minds, were able to regain a sense of themselves.⁹²

⁸⁶ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 248.

⁸⁷ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 249.

⁸⁸ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 260.

⁸⁹ R. Stickgold, “EMDR: A Putative Neurobiological Mechanism of Action,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58 (2002): 61-75, quoted in Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), 261.

⁹⁰ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 270.

⁹¹ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 270.

⁹² Van der Kolk, *Body*, 272-273.

Richard Schwartz developed the technique of Internal Family systems (IFS) therapy.⁹³

“At the core of IFS is the notion that the mind of each of us is like a family in which the members have different levels of maturity, excitability, wisdom, and pain. The parts form a network or system in which change in any one part will affect all the others.”⁹⁴ With dissociation that is often an aspect of trauma; the system of the self crumbles as different parts of the self start opposing one another.⁹⁵ The focus in IFS is on nourishing and developing the partnership between protective parts and the self, more so than establishing a relationship between the therapist and suffering client.⁹⁶

To create new and viable structures, the “protagonist” appoints people or objects that represent those from the person’s past.⁹⁷ Those appointed could act as the people that are closest to the protagonist. This way, those closest to the protagonist can inhabit a tangible space in order to work with their perceived relationship.⁹⁸ People in the group were also appointed to act as the well-wishing, loving and supportive parents.⁹⁹

In the three-dimensional context, the structure changes that which is hidden and feared into a tangible reality. The structure allows for a three-dimensional reality of persons and things that occurred through no choice of the client’s own and provides the opportunity to develop a different result.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 281.

⁹⁴ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 281.

⁹⁵ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 281.

⁹⁶ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 284.

⁹⁷ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 298-299.

⁹⁸ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 298.

⁹⁹ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 298.

¹⁰⁰ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 305.

In the technique known as neurofeedback, a person focuses on objects on a computer screen while they wear electrodes pasted on each side of their skull and one other to the right ear.¹⁰¹ In neurofeedback, what could actually be happening is that innate, but stagnant energies may be made available in our brains, letting new ones to be built.¹⁰² What patients need to do is to be able to transform the habit-forming patterns in the brain that were created by traumatic events and by their lasting effects.¹⁰³

Another way of transforming our inner lives is through communal rhythm, movement, and music.¹⁰⁴ We see this most in the celebration of the Sacred in various traditions and contexts.¹⁰⁵ Each tradition possesses the ability to transform the human heart with calm, strength, and vitality.

Programs for recovery include and support confronting life's painful realities and symbolizing change through acting communally.¹⁰⁶ The emotions that run through people when there is trauma, can be worked through in a healthy way using the dramatic arts as an outlet and a place where healing can take place.¹⁰⁷

People with trauma are very afraid to feel things deeply, mainly because they imagine relinquishing control in order to feel things can put them in danger.¹⁰⁸ A therapeutic antidote to

¹⁰¹ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 313.

¹⁰² Van der Kolk, *Body*, 313.

¹⁰³ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 314.

¹⁰⁴ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 333.

¹⁰⁵ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 333.

¹⁰⁶ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 335.

¹⁰⁷ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 335.

¹⁰⁸ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 335.

this is theater. Theater allows survivors an opportunity to relate with each other by intensely experiencing the humanity they have in common.¹⁰⁹

Laurel Parnell has over thirty years' experience as a meditator and spiritual practitioner. She has integrated psychological and spiritual work for the span of her entire career. Parnell has also served on the faculty of the California Institute for Integral Studies and John F. Kennedy University. Parnell is an expert on EMDR, and specifically on one form of it known as tapping, which occurs through bilateral stimulation. Laurel Parnell defines bilateral stimulation as "The use of eye movements, tactile sensations, sounds or physical movements to stimulate the left and right hemispheres, or sides, of the brain. Bilateral stimulation is used to activate and integrate information from these two hemispheres."¹¹⁰ One pose for tapping is called the butterfly hug. "For the butterfly hug, cross your arms in front of your chest and alternately tap each shoulder. The butterfly hug is helpful to use when you want to feel comforted."¹¹¹ While the person is tapping, they can say comforting things like, "I'm okay. This too shall pass."¹¹² The positive results of tapping can happen fairly quickly bringing a reduction in anxiety and feelings of calm.¹¹³

Parnell observes six basic principles of tapping that have been influenced by Buddhist and nondual philosophy as well as insights from her thirty years of experience with spiritual

¹⁰⁹ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 335.

¹¹⁰ Laurel Parnell, *Tapping In: A Step-By-Step Guide to Activating Your Healing Resources Through Bilateral Stimulation* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2008), 30.

¹¹¹ Parnell, *Tapping*, 37.

¹¹² Parnell, *Tapping*, 88.

¹¹³ Parnell, *Tapping*, 87.

practice and her experience working with clients who were able to find their own sense of wholeness.¹¹⁴ The basic principles are as follows:

1. We are essentially whole. This wholeness is our true nature. The expression of our wholeness is wisdom, compassion, equanimity, power, and joy. 2. Within each of us is the potential to realize this wholeness. Indeed, this wholeness wants to be realized, impels us to realize it. 3. We also have within us a reservoir of positive stored experiences. These can include experiences of loving and being loved, and of feeling comforted, competent, powerful, happy, joyful, peaceful, and calm. 4. We become unhappy when we are not able to access our wholeness, our reservoir of positive experiences, or when we are out of balance. 5. We have a natural healing system that, when accessed and activated using bilateral stimulation (tapping), can restore us to balance. 6. We can access, strengthen, and integrate our wholeness and our reservoir of resources by tapping in our resources.¹¹⁵

Parnell is suggesting that we are able to heal using tapping as a resource and how it is that we are all capable of creating and maintaining a certain measure of balance in our lives.

Conclusion

In part one I have first, provided a description of post traumatic stress disorder and the affect it has on people. Second, I have shown the affects of trauma in terms of symptoms and challenges. Third, I have outlined different methods through which to bring about healing from PTSD and restore one's sense of self.

¹¹⁴ Parnell, *Tapping*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Parnell, *Tapping*, 20-21.

Part II Literature Review

The second part of this chapter reviews literature that explores the work of other prominent researchers of trauma. They include: Duane Bidwell, who offers a competency approach to healing; Tedeschi and Calhoun, who define post traumatic growth; the criteria set forth by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders; James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, who suggest that the emotions of wonder, joy, compassion, and hope can contribute to healing from the affects of trauma; Bessel A. van der Kolk, Lars Weisaeth, and Onno Van Der Hart, who conclude that there is a connection between culture, society, history, and politics and how we deal with traumatic stress; Raymond B. Flannery, who takes a stress management approach to learned helplessness; and finally George W. Burns, who uses positive psychology to teach clients what they can do to achieve happiness in their lives.

First, in the article, “A Competency Approach to Healing ‘Past Life’ Trauma,” Duane Bidwell documents a client’s journey toward healing by utilizing the client’s own resources and skills. This specific form of counseling is called competency-based counseling, in which “theory and technique from solution-focused brief therapy, narrative therapy, and O’Hanlon’s possibility therapy [are used] to move clients toward their goal as quickly as possible.”¹¹⁶ This type of therapy allows the client their own sense of agency.

The client, whose pseudonym is Anna, had symptoms of trauma, such as headaches, chronic-fatigue syndrome, could not think clearly, and had insomnia. Anna had been divorced for several years and had retired from a career in secretarial work. Besides being affiliated with a mainline Protestant church, she also followed the teachings of the Theosophical Society.¹¹⁷ Thus,

¹¹⁶ Duane R. Bidwell, “A Competency Approach to Healing ‘Past Life’ Trauma,” *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 4, no. 1 (2001): 5.

¹¹⁷ Bidwell, “A Competency Approach,” 6.

“[h]er religious/spiritual orientation include[d] belief in both reincarnation and psychic phenomena and in therapeutic touch, a hand-mediated energy therapy similar to reiki.”¹¹⁸ Anna had several modes that helped her identify her place in the universe.

Anna’s traumas included sexual abuse by her father as well as memories that she believes are from two past lives. One memory was of her being a young man who was raped, then killed in a cave by other men.¹¹⁹ In her other memory, “she was a male slave imprisoned in a cage and raped, tortured, and finally killed by his master. Anna sought counseling to integrate and heal these traumas from her past lives.”¹²⁰ Anna had the will, determination, and hope to recover.

As mentioned, competency-based counseling concentrates “on the skills, resources, agency and expertise of the counselee, building on strengths and highlighting changes already occurring, in order to move people toward a more abundant life as quickly as possible.”¹²¹ This form of pastoral counseling is influenced by secular therapies and the pastoral implementation of these therapies by various scholars in the field.¹²² The method acknowledges that transformation is based on a God that is active and constant and has already created new ways of being for the person.¹²³ The pastoral counselor’s challenge is to join the counselee as the two create a new way of being whose foundation is divinely inspired transformation that has already begun.¹²⁴

A competency-based approach was successfully applied to Anna’s case. The counselor identified that he was limited in what he knew of past life trauma, making the counselee, Anna

¹¹⁸ Bidwell, “A Competency Approach,” 6.

¹¹⁹ Bidwell, “A Competency Approach,” 6.

¹²⁰ Bidwell, “A Competency Approach,” 6.

¹²¹ Bidwell, “A Competency Approach,” 6.

¹²² Bidwell, “A Competency Approach,” 6.

¹²³ Bidwell, “A Competency Approach,” 6.

¹²⁴ Bidwell, “A Competency Approach,” 7.

an expert in her own healing. He asked Anna to take note of the things that were good in her life that she wanted to continue doing. He used externalizing language to help locate the problem outside of her, as more of an observational tool. This way, instead of dealing with pathologies, Anna would be dealing with the problem. The counselor helped to find and emphasize Anna's own strengths, resources, and skills that she may have missed on her own. By doing so, he highlighted Anna's own sense of agency in attaining healing.¹²⁵ These are some of the many ways that a competency approach was successfully applied to Anna's case.

By the end of Anna's therapy, she had successfully achieved a sense of her own strength, by being able to play a part in her own healing.¹²⁶ Comments Bidwell, "the focus on outcome early in the process, with an emphasis on her agency over the problem, helped Anna *experience* herself differently and thus *think* about herself differently."¹²⁷ The competency-based approach allowed Anna, as the client, to be confident in her own process.¹²⁸ "Often our ideas about what is important in counseling are different from our counselee's ideas; Anna's reflections, for example, helped remind me not to be so focused on theory and technique that I miss the most essential element of healing: the therapeutic relationship."¹²⁹ The therapeutic relationship put Anna on the driver's seat for her own healing, making Anna feel the confidence she needed that helped her heal.

¹²⁵ Bidwell, "A Competency Approach," 14.

¹²⁶ Bidwell, "A Competency Approach," 15.

¹²⁷ Bidwell, "A Competency Approach," 15.

¹²⁸ Bidwell, "A Competency Approach," 15.

¹²⁹ Bidwell, "A Competency Approach," 15.

Second, Tedeschi and Calhoun define post traumatic growth as “the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises.”¹³⁰ Post traumatic growth reveals itself as added appreciation for life itself, relationships that have more meaning, an added sense of strength, a change in what is prioritized, and finally, an enhanced sense of existence and life of the spirit.¹³¹ Post traumatic growth occurs when a person is in major crisis that presents acute challenges and may even collapse a person’s view of the world and their place in it.¹³² “Certain kinds of personal qualities – extraversion, openness to experience, and perhaps optimism – may make growth a bit more likely. Initially, the individual typically must engage in coping responses needed to manage overwhelming emotions, but intense cognitive processing of the difficult circumstances also occurs.”¹³³ To what extent a person engages cognitively because of the crisis is apparently the main determinant of the post traumatic growth process. A person’s social system might also contribute to a central role in the growth process, by way of adapting new schemas that are growth-related, and by sheer empathetic acceptance of the shared experience of the trauma and of themes that are growth-related. Post traumatic growth also has a strong association with developing wisdom in life, and developing and modifying a person’s life narrative.¹³⁴

Although post traumatic growth has been found to be correlated with a reduction of distress, our thinking is [that] some degree of psychological upset or distress is necessary not only to set the process of growth in motion, but also [because] some enduring upset may accompany the enhancement and maintenance of post traumatic growth.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun, “Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence,” *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (2004): 1.

¹³¹ Tedeschi and Calhoun, “Posttraumatic Growth,” 1.

¹³² Tedeschi and Calhoun, “Posttraumatic Growth,” 12.

¹³³ Tedeschi and Calhoun, “Posttraumatic Growth,” 12.

¹³⁴ Tedeschi and Calhoun, “Posttraumatic Growth,” 12.

¹³⁵ Tedeschi and Calhoun, “Posttraumatic Growth,” 12-13.

So, growth happens as a result of some sort of trauma happening first. Wisdom can rise out of the most tragic of situations as well.

Third, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) has a criterion for post traumatic stress disorder. I summarize them as follows: A. The results of a direct experience of trauma can manifest in different people-those who have direct experience, those who have witnessed the events, those who have learned of the events, and those who have continuous exposure because of their work. B. A person may be afflicted with one or more of the following: recurrent memories, night mares, dissociation, distress at situations that are similar to the traumatic event, having physical sensations that are triggered by situations that are similar to the event. C. Avoidance of anything that serves as a reminder of the event. D. Experiencing an altered state of being including two or more of these markers: lack of memory, negative thoughts about the self and other people, exaggerated blame on any or all parties involved including oneself or others, constant negativity toward everything, lack of interest in the things that were once fulfilling, feeling disconnected from other people, and unable to feel positive about anything and everything all the time. E. Changes in reactions related to a traumatic event including two or more of these markers: irritability and acting out with anger, erratic behavior, actions or actions that are harmful to oneself, intensely on-guard all the time, easily startled, inability to concentrate, and problems sleeping. F. Disturbances that have been happening for at least a month. G. The disturbance makes a person severely unable to function in everyday life. H. Disturbances are not caused by anything that can alter a person's consciousness, or any health issue.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013) 271-272.

Fourth, in *Nourishing the Spirit: The Healing Emotions of Wonder, Joy, Compassion and Hope*, James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead suggest that to be passionate is to be engaged in our faith. Our passions are expressed in the outrage of injustice, we act with care to those we love or those who are in need, and we find ourselves in a state of awe at beauty we find in the world. As life presents us with setbacks, hope passionately keeps us afloat.¹³⁷

The Psalms are thick with emotion.¹³⁸ Psalm 1 declares, for example, “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked.” Psalm 16 notes, “You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy. In your right hand are pleasures ever more.” We also see emotions that are negative, as in Psalm 7: “I am weary with my moaning...my eyes are wasted away with grief.”¹³⁹ The struggles that we feel as humans were verbalized in the Psalms. By seeing our struggles in the Psalms, it places our struggles of the here and now into context.¹⁴⁰ These intense emotions give historical witness to the strengthening of their faith in an awesome God.¹⁴¹

Early Christians were also very much influenced by stoic philosophy. It dominated in the world of those who spoke Greek and proposed that if one were to achieve a state of tranquility, one needed to do away with extremes of passion.¹⁴² As a consequence,

Christians became tempted to replace the gospel images of Jesus being moved by strong emotions-anger, sadness, fear-with a more sedate vision: Jesus as “meek and humble of

¹³⁷ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Nourishing the Spirit: The Healing Emotions of Wonder, Joy, Compassion, and Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012), chap. 1, Kindle.

¹³⁸ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹³⁹ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁴⁰ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁴¹ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁴² Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

heart” (Mt. 11:29). In the understandings of the life of faith that developed in these early centuries in the west, this overly cautious approach to emotions began to win out.¹⁴³

Our primary understanding of Jesus is one who is mostly mild in temperament.

The result was that Christians found themselves in states of complacency and voided any sense of passion.¹⁴⁴ “Negative emotions of fear (of possibly doing wrong) and guilt (of having done wrong) came to dominate their emotional life. ...The passion of anger was declared one of the seven deadly sins, disqualifying its contribution in our response to malice and injustice.”¹⁴⁵ Where there was courage, caution took its place and composure was sought over adventure. Celebration with all of its enthusiasm was down-played in pursuit of civic order and temperance. But temperance turned to be an impediment to people’s testimony of the great God of their salvation.¹⁴⁶

In contrast, contemporary trends among Christians show the interest in the connection between intense emotion and the search for the spiritual. This reminds us of the words of Thomas Aquinas back in the thirteenth century. Aquinas was influenced by the Greek philosopher Aristotle as he closed the gap between virtue and passion.¹⁴⁷ “In a radical departure from the dominant piety of his time, Aquinas insisted that ‘moral virtues cannot be without the passions.’ For Aquinas, virtue and strong emotion are not adversaries. Love and courage and devotion are passions, now become virtues.”¹⁴⁸ Aquinas saw the connection between being both good and spirited at the same time. Expressive faith reconciles itself with good character.

¹⁴³ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁴⁴ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁴⁵ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁴⁶ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁴⁷ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁴⁸ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

Positive psychology successfully made the switch from traditional psychology that treats illness, focusing on what is wrong in the patient. In 1997, while president of the American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman suggested that positive psychology be included in all research and practice.¹⁴⁹ Positive psychology focuses on what lifts us up and what it means to be the best version of ourselves as humans.

When we experience painful emotions, our sympathetic nervous system is triggered, in turn increasing our heart. Our nervous system then responds, to prepare for engagement or exit from any threatening situation.¹⁵⁰

Painful emotions are part of what it is to have meaning in life. The problem is that the triggering of painful emotions can be expensive in the sense that they can leave us feeling depleted as the painful emotions can be volatile in the way that they can become habitual ways of being and manifest themselves in behavior that is toxic. Anger, which can also be triggered by our sense of dignity, can turn into a chronic sense of resentment. Fear, which can also be seen as a system of warning, can turn into an immobilizing phobia. Guilt, which can also be seen as the emotion that guards the goodness in us, is turned into a twisted sense of judgment of every move we make.¹⁵¹ “When these essential emotions spread beyond their proper domains, they darken our world, casting shadows over experiences of joy, delight, and appreciation. Burdened by painful emotions that have become chronic, we have little energy available for empathy or hope or even curiosity.”¹⁵² The pain of trauma can take up so much negative energy inside us that it robs us of any of the pleasures that this life has to offer.

¹⁴⁹ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁵⁰ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁵¹ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁵² Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

Positive emotions tend to be difficult to make time for, time that is consumed mostly by negative affects. The parasympathetic nervous system is activated by healing emotions, assisting in relaxation, and at the same time, energy is being restored.¹⁵³

Whitehead and Whitehead focus on emotions that assist in healing. Gratitude helps us remember the abundance that we may take for granted.¹⁵⁴ Mercy allows for compassion. Wonder takes us out of ourselves and helps us see the beauty of the world that surrounds us.¹⁵⁵ These other-worldly emotions help comfort and heal us.¹⁵⁶ Emotions can help keep us together, as opposed to unglued. Emotions can also help heal us in the vulnerability of our lives. Positive emotions are healing in the sense that they can help broaden and build on our ability to adapt.¹⁵⁷

Fifth, according to van der Kolk, Lars Weisaeth, and Onno Van der Hart, in terms of trauma's history in psychiatry, we see the connection between culture, society, history, and politics on one side of the coin, and on the other side, how traumatic stress is dealt with.¹⁵⁸ It is evident that traumatic neurosis seems to move with the ebb and flow of the age in which explanations and theories are presented.¹⁵⁹ "History demonstrates that psychiatry is embedded in social forces, possibly more so than any other branch of medicine. These cultural forces include the status of women and children, patriotic and financial consideration, legal processes, traditions

¹⁵³ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁵⁴ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁵⁵ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁵⁶ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁵⁷ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Nourishing*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁵⁸ Bessel A. van der Kolk, Lars Weisaeth, and Onno van Der Hart, "History of Trauma in Psychiatry," in *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, ed. Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth (New York: Guilford Press, 1996), 66.

¹⁵⁹ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, "History," 66.

about workers' compensation, and other economic and political processes."¹⁶⁰ Here we see that there are surprising factors at play when we look into trauma in the field of psychiatry.

Psychiatry seems to have a way of forgetting about how important trauma is as a condition. This can be known as "repetition compulsion."¹⁶¹ Due to repeated denials of trauma's affect on a person's psychological state, legitimate knowledge gets lost, then gets discovered anew over and over again.¹⁶² In the field of psychiatry, there has been a state of denial about the existence of psychological trauma. Many scholars within the field, however, have continued to pursue their study of psychological trauma due to their own lived experiences.¹⁶³

There have been some professionals in psychiatry that have tried to increase awareness of and acknowledgement of the importance of how trauma contributes to suffering. After much denial about the condition, a resurgence of interest in it in the 1970s also unfortunately led to many people wanting to blame all of humanity's psychological illness on the condition of trauma.¹⁶⁴ "Psychiatry is a field of fashions; dominant schools of thought, therapist ideology, and the charisma of particular clinicians have always had a powerful impact on developing untenable biases. Too often, these have led to acrimonious polarizations within the profession, at the expense of good patient care."¹⁶⁵ The study of trauma seems to arbitrarily fall wherever the direction of the tide takes it. Genuine concern for those suffering from psychological trauma seems to be absent.

¹⁶⁰ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, "History," 66-67.

¹⁶¹ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, "History," 67.

¹⁶² Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, "History," 67.

¹⁶³ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, "History," 67.

¹⁶⁴ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, "History," 67.

¹⁶⁵ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, "History," 67.

Every new generation of psychiatrists seems to seek a new way of communicating and of finding a new, up-to-date voice that resonates with the current political climate. This may not be detrimental if people continue to acknowledge the truth of what psychic trauma is and how it is articulated.¹⁶⁶ “However, though this continual reinvention of the psychological wheel may make for interesting careers, it does not foster a solid accumulation of knowledge or the development of an effective treatment repertoire.”¹⁶⁷ The cycle is continually visiting and revisiting the same ideas about trauma. The terminology is different, while the core ideas stay the same, rendering the field of psychology at a standstill lacking genuine, real progress.

So, is the field of psychiatry doomed to repeat yet another cycle of ignoring the condition of psychic trauma? It happened several times in the twentieth century.¹⁶⁸ Just as an individual recovering from trauma may have trouble accessing memories of trauma, the field of mental health has trouble recognizing collective trauma. This ignorance of collective trauma can be seen as an abuse itself.¹⁶⁹ Van der Kolk et. al. state that

It is not likely that these amnesias and dissociations will be things of the past; they are likely to continue as long as we physicians and psychologists are faced with human breakdown in the face of overwhelming stress, which flies in the face of our inherent hubris of imagining ourselves as masters of our own fate, and as long as we need to hide from the intolerable reality of “man’s inhumanity to man.”¹⁷⁰

Van der Kolk et. al., suggest that there will not likely be a change in the future for the study of trauma as long as there lives the idea that trauma is not real. Psychologists will have to live with themselves as they continue to stand by and watch people suffer.

¹⁶⁶ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, “History,” 67.

¹⁶⁷ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, “History,” 67.

¹⁶⁸ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, “History,” 67.

¹⁶⁹ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, “History,” 67.

¹⁷⁰ Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, and Van Der Hart, “History,” 67.

Sixth, Raymond B. Flannery discusses learned helplessness and how clients can heal through a stress management approach. When patients have experienced prolonged trauma, they are likely to develop “numbing: psychological constriction, depression, social isolation, anhedonia, and a sense of estrangement.”¹⁷¹ Therapy remains difficult for these patients as they struggle to verbalize and potentially relive their trauma in the process. Therapists witness these signs of trauma in their patients,¹⁷² and note that, much of the time patients will avoid the reality of the traumatic event and the impact it has had on their own lives.¹⁷³

These behaviors are marks of what is called learned helplessness.¹⁷⁴ This is where the patient “loses the capacity to appreciate the connection between their actions and their ability to influence the course of their lives. This perception of loss of control leads to a passive stance and either social withdrawal from, or clinging to, caregivers, family members, or mental health professionals.”¹⁷⁵ Learned helplessness leaves the patient feeling as though there is no way to make their situation better. All sense of agency in this world feels unattainable to those who experience learned helplessness.

Research has shown that people who are able to respond to stressors in life with success tend to exhibit “a strong sense of connection between their own actions, their feeling states, and their capacities to influence the course of their lives.”¹⁷⁶ Persons who are stress-resistant tend to

¹⁷¹ Raymond B. Flannery, Jr., “From Victim to Survivor: A Stress Management Approach in the Treatment of Learned Helplessness,” in *Psychological Trauma*, ed. Bessel A. van der Kolk (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1987), 217.

¹⁷² Flannery, “From Victim,” 217.

¹⁷³ Flannery, “From Victim,” 217.

¹⁷⁴ Flannery, “From Victim,” 218.

¹⁷⁵ Flannery, “From Victim,” 218.

¹⁷⁶ Flannery, “From Victim,” 218.

have control over their lives and are involved in different activities. They also tend to have a regular, daily routine as well as socially supportive people in their circles.¹⁷⁷ Feelings of satisfaction with life are evident in those people who are stress-resistant after having gone through trials. “While capable of negative affects when faced with adversity, a belief in their actions to resolve problems results in a general mood of well-being.”¹⁷⁸ Stress-resistant people are able to process life’s setbacks in such a way that they achieve a sense of contentment.

Persons with learned helplessness tend to show no perceived sense of control, passivity, show affects of trauma in their lives, withdrawal, and depressed moods. Stress-resistant people show a sense of personal control, participation, adapt well to stressors, reach out for support, and possess a pleasant disposition.¹⁷⁹

A way to assist traumatized individuals in their healing is to teach them the stress management techniques of stress-resistant persons.¹⁸⁰ Traumatized people who have “learned helplessness can increase active mastery of the environment and decrease avoidant behavior, social isolation, and depressive affect.”¹⁸¹ A sense of personal autonomy and participation can help alleviate some of the affects of learned helplessness.¹⁸²

Seventh, in using positive psychology, George W. Burns asserts that the client can be taught what they can do to achieve a significant amount of happiness. He discusses three aspects of happiness: pleasure, engagement, and meaning. A person can experience all three of these

¹⁷⁷ Flannery, “From Victim,” 218.

¹⁷⁸ Flannery, “From Victim,” 218-219.

¹⁷⁹ Flannery, “From Victim,” 221.

¹⁸⁰ Flannery, “From Victim,” 219.

¹⁸¹ Flannery, “From Victim,” 219.

¹⁸² Flannery, “From Victim,” 219.

aspects of happiness simultaneously, or one or two of the three. A good example of this is of gardening.¹⁸³

A therapist can help the client by increasing instances of pleasure.¹⁸⁴ “The pleasant life is one that is rich in positive emotions about the past, present, and future.”¹⁸⁵ The therapist can first inquire about the activities the client finds to be pleasurable — what activities they engaged in the past, what activities they engage in the present, and what activities they can envision themselves engaging in the future. The therapist can find ways to help the client to get involved in the activities.¹⁸⁶

Another experience of pleasure toward which the therapist can guide the client is to develop a sense of gratitude.¹⁸⁷ With gratitude, the client is able to focus on the good in life that may often be overlooked.

The client can likewise focus their attention on their senses.¹⁸⁸ The client can engage in a sensory awareness exercise by concentrating on the senses, one at a time.¹⁸⁹ “Helping clients tune in to their senses in mindful ways facilitates engagement and optimal experiences.”¹⁹⁰ Through the senses, clients can recover their ability to relate to others, taking a closer step toward living in deep fulfillment and satisfaction.

¹⁸³ George W. Burns, “Now I Can Get on with Life: Pleasure, Engagement, and Meaning in a Case of Major Depression,” in *Happiness, Healing, Enhancement: Your Casebook Collection for Applying Positive Psychology in Therapy*, ed. George W. Burns (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010), 127.

¹⁸⁴ Burns, “Now,” 137.

¹⁸⁵ Burns, “Now,” 137.

¹⁸⁶ Burns, “Now,” 137.

¹⁸⁷ Burns, “Now,” 137.

¹⁸⁸ Burns, “Now,” 137.

¹⁸⁹ Burns, “Now,” 138.

¹⁹⁰ Burns, “Now,” 138.

Engagement is another component of the full life, as Seligman asserts.¹⁹¹ “A life in which a person feels engaged, involved, and absorbed is a life of greater happiness.”¹⁹² A client must also find their special strengths. The website www.authentic happiness.com can help a person identify what things they are good at, what their strengths are, and finally, their specific capabilities.¹⁹³ The therapist can also assist the client to find meaning in their lives.¹⁹⁴ For, “[w]ith things to enjoy and look forward to (pleasure), with a focus of attention on one’s strengths (engagement), and with a new sense of purpose and direction from utilizing those strengths in the service of others (meaning), clients are empowered to live much fuller and happier lives.”¹⁹⁵ The components to live a life of autonomy and vitality are within every human. So, a person who wishes to heal looks forward to the task of self discovery.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have included summaries of various articles on trauma to expand on the definition of PTSD and what it means to heal. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders was summarized to clarify specific criteria for post traumatic stress disorder. Trauma’s history sheds light on how we have thought of trauma in the past and how it is that the past affects the present and future.

¹⁹¹ Burns, “Now,” 127.

¹⁹² Burns, “Now,” 137.

¹⁹³ Burns, “Now,” 137.

¹⁹⁴ Burns, “Now,” 137.

¹⁹⁵ Burns, “Now,” 137.

Chapter Two

Flow and Trauma

Introduction

Flow is one of the many components in positive psychology. Flow creates positive experiences and feelings that provide the human with a sense of agency, satisfaction, and accomplishment, to name but a few characteristics of flow. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow happens when you are engaging in an activity and you feel like time stands still. You do not notice time passing by. In the activity you are engaging in, the goals are not so high that you cannot attain them, but they are not so low that it is too easy, creating a sense of boredom. We see the results of human suffering in the occurrence of psychic entropy. Flow can help relieve those states. It seems that flow or optimal experiences can also be useful in recovery and healing in psychopathology.

In this chapter I will first introduce the psychological aspects of flow. Second, I will outline some of the conditions that need to be present for flow to occur. Third, I will describe the results of flow. Fourth and finally, I will show how flow can be utilized in the healing and recovery of trauma and its potential use in psychoanalysis.

Psychological Aspects of Flow

First, according to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, research in human psychology has largely been biased toward pathology. What is missing is the study of real, everyday lives and the extent to which they experience enjoyment and creativity. The psychological aspects of flow include conscious self, consciousness, goals, psychic entropy, psychic negentropy/optimal

experience/flow, and teleonomy of the self. The “conscious self” has been vastly ignored in modern psychological awareness and arenas of the current century.¹⁹⁶

We can understand what the self is by looking at the functions of the self.

Csikszentmihalyi describes the functions of the self as a mediator between genetic and cultural influences. “The function of the self is to mediate between the genetic instructions that manifest themselves as ‘instinctual drives’ and the cultural instructions that appear as norms and rules. The self must prioritize between these various behavioral instructions and select among them the ones it wants to endorse.”¹⁹⁷ So that the self can find a middle ground between the instinctual drives and the norms and rules of culture, there has to be a way by which the self can select, store, and recover information. This capacity is known as consciousness. Three components make up consciousness:¹⁹⁸ “attention, which takes notice of information available; awareness, which interprets the information; and memory, which stores the information. The content of consciousness is experience, that is, the sum of all the information that enters it, and its interpretation by awareness.”¹⁹⁹ Consciousness can be identified by the accumulation of lived events from our past and how it is that we make sense of them.

The self’s utmost goal is to survive once it establishes itself in consciousness. The self wants only to recreate those frames of consciousness that are friendly to the self. Conversely, the self wants to be rid of those states of consciousness that make threats against it. Attention, awareness, and memory are in charge of recreating those frames of consciousness in the self.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Isabella Selega Csikszentmihalyi, eds., *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 15.

¹⁹⁷ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 17.

¹⁹⁸ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 17.

¹⁹⁹ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 17.

²⁰⁰ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 22.

Goals are the priorities of the self. The mainframe of a self is based upon an order of goals. Every new experience is interpreted as a goal in consideration of the self. Information received can either strengthen or weaken the self in terms of its goals. Goals mostly derive from biological properties or culture through society. We do have some leeway with consciousness in these areas in terms of freedom and agency.²⁰¹

Psychic entropy is when disorder is experienced at the point of conflict with such goals.²⁰² “Psychic entropy is a condition in which there is ‘noise’ in the information-processing system. It is experienced as fear, boredom, apathy, anxiety, confusion, jealousy, and a hundred other nuances, depending on the nature of the information and the kinds of goals the information is in conflict with.”²⁰³ In psychic entropy, negative emotions are at full attention. These emotions, for example, can be set off by plans that have been foiled by circumstances outside of our control.²⁰⁴

The converse of psychic entropy is “psychic negentropy, optimal experience, or flow. It obtains when all the contents of consciousness are in harmony with each other, and with the goals that define the person’s self. These are the subjective conditions we call pleasure, happiness, satisfaction, enjoyment.”²⁰⁵ Flow turns into the focal point of the self due to the fact that self wants to reproduce itself and the fact that it is most in-sync with its own goal oriented framework at the time when optimal experience occurs.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 22.

²⁰² Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 22.

²⁰³ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 22.

²⁰⁴ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 22.

²⁰⁵ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 24.

²⁰⁶ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 24.

This is what is known as teleonomy of the self, meaning the propensity to aim for goals that ultimately determine the choices that we make. Teleonomy of the self is the third of three components that affect what we as humans choose to act upon in the world. The others are genetic teleonomy, whereby biological patterning duplicates itself over time, and cultural teleonomy, where norms and values of the social order are imposed on human action, again to duplicate itself generationally.²⁰⁷ Thus all three determine their ongoing preservation.

The social sciences are very familiar with both the teleonomies of culture and of genetics. But there is not much information and research concerning the teleonomy of the self.²⁰⁸ For the teleonomy of the self, the question is, “What is it that people do to fulfill their being?”²⁰⁹ This sense of fulfillment is what people find most optimally in flow experiences.

Conditions of Flow

Second, what are the conditions of flow? In order for flow to be present, the following eight components or requirements must be in place: (1) Goals must be clear: There must be a clear definition of an objective. Feedback must be attained immediately: the individual is able to instantly perceive how well they are performing. (2) Skills are met by appropriate challenge levels. (3) Awareness and action are joined together to produce a focused mind. (4) Concentration is absorbed by the present stimuli while all other distractions of worry disappear. (5) Control is attainable. (6) Sense of self dissolves as well as the ego as one experiences personal growth and feels as though they are at one with a greater Being or cause than

²⁰⁷ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 24.

²⁰⁸ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 24.

²⁰⁹ Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 24.

themselves. (7) Time is altered and passes by quickly. (8) The activity at hand becomes autotelic, worthy of being undertaken for its own sake as a source of enjoyment.²¹⁰

An example of the first condition is the tennis player who knows immediately that she has met her goal of getting the ball over the net to her opponent.²¹¹ Similarly, “[t]he climber inching up a vertical wall of rock has a very simple goal in mind: to complete the climb without failing. Every second, hour after hour, he receives information that he is meeting that basic goal.”²¹² This is what makes the climb all the more satisfying.

The second condition is that activities must have a specific goal and have specific rules by which a participant abides. By having goals and rules, a fair amount of psychic energy is used, which would not be possible unless the appropriate skills were involved.²¹³ “Any activity contains a bundle of opportunities for action, or ‘challenges,’ that require appropriate skills to realize. For those who don’t have the right skills, the activity is not challenging; it is simply meaningless.”²¹⁴ Any game will be meaningless for a person who does not know how to play it.²¹⁵

The third condition for flow is that all a person’s actions are dominated by the appropriate skills to meet the challenges that present themselves. There is no longer room in the psyche to think about anything else. All attention is focused on the task at hand.²¹⁶

²¹⁰ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 178-179.

²¹¹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990), 54.

²¹² Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 54.

²¹³ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 49.

²¹⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 50.

²¹⁵ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 50.

²¹⁶ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 53.

As a result, one of the most universal and distinctive features of optimal experience takes place: people become so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost automatic; they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing.²¹⁷

The entire person is consumed with concentration on the one activity.

The fourth condition for flow is that there is no room in the mind to wonder about life's hardships. The sheer enjoyment of the activity that demands concentration overrides any thoughts that may bring worry or concern to a person.²¹⁸

Consequently the ordinary state of mind involves unexpected and frequent episodes of entropy interfering with the smooth run of psychic energy. This is one reason why flow improves the quality of experience: the clearly structured demands of the activity impose order, and exclude the interference of disorder in consciousness.²¹⁹

Psychic entropy is set aside, while feelings of satisfaction are acquired.

Fifth, the control that a person feels while they are totally focused on something is really about the absence of the negative preoccupation about lack of control that is unavoidably found in much of their day-to-day life.²²⁰ “[R]espondents...have described the *possibility*, rather than the *actuality*, of control. The ballet dancer may fall, break her leg, and never make the perfect turn, ...But at least in principle, in the world of flow perfection is attainable.”²²¹ In the flow activity, control is present by way of improvement.

Sixth, a person begins to feel as though they are completely one with their environment. In our everyday lives, there are many opportunities to be reminded of our self as we feel threatened and vulnerable.²²² “But in flow there is no room for self-scrutiny. Because enjoyable

²¹⁷ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 53.

²¹⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 58.

²¹⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 58.

²²⁰ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 59.

²²¹ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 60.

²²² Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 63.

activities have clear goals, stable rules, and challenges well matched to skills, there is little opportunity for the self to be threatened.”²²³ The self is protected by components of flow that allow it to flourish. To clarify, to lose self-consciousness does not mean losing the self, or losing consciousness. It means that a person loses consciousness of their selves. Our conceptions of ourselves are temporarily suspended. This feeling has been deemed to be very enjoyable. When we are not conscious of our selves, there is the opportunity to expand our conceptions of ourselves. Such loss of consciousness of the self can bring about self-transcendence, the feeling that the limits of our selves have been expanded.²²⁴ “This feeling is not just a fancy of the imagination, but is based on a concrete experience of close interaction with some Other, an interaction that produces a rare sense of unity with these usually foreign entities.”²²⁵ These entities are hobbies, interests, or a sense of camaraderie with others when engaged as a group.²²⁶

Seventh, our sense of time becomes suspended in some way.²²⁷ “The safest generalization to make about this phenomenon is to say that during the flow experience the sense of time bears little relation to the passage of time as measured by the absolute convention of the clock.”²²⁸ The usual way we experience and understand time is not the same as when we are in the state of flow. We are in flow time.

Eighth and finally, the origin of the word, “autotelic” comes from the Greek language where auto means self, and telos means goal.²²⁹ “It refers to a self-contained activity, one that is

²²³ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 63.

²²⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 64.

²²⁵ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 64.

²²⁶ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 64-65.

²²⁷ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 66.

²²⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 66.

²²⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 67.

done not with the expectation of some future benefit, but simply because the doing itself is the reward.”²³⁰ Activities are engaged upon for the sake of the joy of the activity alone. Not all activities are rewarding at first, but once the person begins to enjoy the activity, they are more likely to want to reproduce the positive feedback they gain from feeling stretched.²³¹

Results of Flow

The results of flow can be seen in terms of creativity, peak performance, talent development, productivity, self-esteem, stress reduction, and finally, clinical applications. In creativity, we see that artists and scientists attribute their success to the fact that they enjoyed what they were doing. People typically do not make monumental discoveries in their field unless they enjoy the task at hand. Money and fame do not offer as much motivation as flow experiences do.²³²

Flow experiences contribute to peak performances. We see this in athletes, musicians, and other performers. The flow experiences motivate them to push themselves to their very limits. These people strive to be in a flow state repeatedly. Yet one does not need to be a world-class athlete in order to be in a flow state and excel as a result of the flow state. Much progress can be made by the non-professional due to the flow state.²³³

Talent development is another consequence of flow. It has been found that teens who enjoyed themselves when engaged in activities at which they were talented, showed that they

²³⁰ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 67.

²³¹ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 68.

²³² Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 192-193.

²³³ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 193.

were able to carry on and develop those skills on to high school and even beyond.²³⁴ “The frequency of flow, more than objective measures of cognitive ability (such as Scholastic Aptitude Test), and more than personality traits or parental status and income, was the best predictor of the development of talent.”²³⁵ Talent development was determined by how often teens were able to experience the flow state in a specified activity.

In terms of productivity, one would surmise that persons experiencing flow at work are more committed to their work. There are still not enough studies done on the topic, though. What has been found is that those who experienced flow at work at an above average level have been found to be happier and be more motivated in general, and most notably, when doing their work. Such people also tend to stay at work for thirty minutes longer every day than those who had fewer flow experiences. Economically at least, that makes a big difference over the course of time.²³⁶

Strong self-esteem is another result of flow. It has been shown that those who have more flow experiences also generally have higher self-esteem. Self-esteem is at its height right after people have the flow experience.²³⁷ “After being in flow, people report being more successful, they feel better about themselves, and they feel that they are living up more to their own and others’ expectations.”²³⁸ Flow creates the perfect opportunity for positive growth. The study’s finding has held true among working mothers, average teenagers, and talented teens.²³⁹ This finding at first seems to contradict that a person forgets about self when experiencing flow. But

²³⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 193.

²³⁵ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 193.

²³⁶ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 194.

²³⁷ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 194.

²³⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 194.

²³⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 194.

both are true: after experiencing flow, people have said that they felt a particular sense of success. This is how we can say that the flow experience can help build a person's self-esteem.²⁴⁰

Stress reduction is another result of flow. It has been shown that when business executives experience flow concurrently with periods of high stress, they had fewer health issues than those executives that had anxiety with the equivalent stress. Those men who experienced flow at work also reported more positive attitudes and emotions at work and home, such as feeling stronger and happier. The executives that documented more physical illness were also the ones that documented more events that caused stress in their lives. However, if those people had the flow experience at work, their stress promoted fewer health issues.²⁴¹ “Apparently the ability to match the challenges of the job with personal skills—or at least the perception of doing so—acts as a buffer between entropic conditions and their usual negative psychic consequences.”²⁴² The presence of flow at work can lead to less stress and better health.

The clinical applications of flow are another result of the flow experience. There is budding evidence that supports the idea that there is much the flow experience can do to help in psychotherapy. Examples are few, but show much hope in the healing process. One such example is that of a woman named Caterina. Caterina is twenty-five years of age, and single. She endured years of anxiety that was triggered by being in public places. What brought Caterina to the fullness of life was doing the activities that she enjoyed, along with assistance from her doctor who, at the start of her treatment, accompanied her in public places that typically caused her anxiety. Caterina joined groups that participated in two activities in which she found joy:

²⁴⁰ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 195.

²⁴¹ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 195.

²⁴² Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 195.

doing volunteer work and going dancing.²⁴³ “After a year and a half of this intervention, Caterina’s life had substantially changed for the better. ...she stopped medication and ended therapy. This and similar cases point to the close connection between flow and a consciousness that is harmonious, capable of developing a self that is in control of its inner energy.”²⁴⁴ Caterina’s case is an example of how the experience of flow can assist in the healing process where psychological conditions are concerned.

Flow and Trauma

Fourth and finally, I will include some examples of how flow can be used in the healing and recovery of trauma and its potential use in psychoanalysis. Richard D. Logan’s article titled “The ‘Flow Experience’ in Solitary Ordeals” teaches us that the flow experience can be utilized as a coping method not only after trauma, but actually at the time of the traumatic event. “One characteristic of individuals who manage to survive situations of prolonged hardship (captivity, isolation, trek) is that they arrange their situations and their activities so as to create the elements of flow experiences.”²⁴⁵ Flow activities can help people deal with acutely distressing events.

Logan provides an example of a man named Sir Geoffrey Jackson. He was held prisoner for several months by South American guerrillas. “I have concluded that the captive requires two classes of routine, corresponding to two distinct human needs – the need to break up his day, and the need to fill up his day. I had already developed many such routines.”²⁴⁶ Logan explains that when Jackson uses the words “breaking up,” he means variety and stimulus. When Jackson says

²⁴³ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 195-196.

²⁴⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 196-197.

²⁴⁵ Richard D. Logan, “The ‘Flow Experience’ in Solitary Ordeals,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 25 (1985): 80.

²⁴⁶ Logan, “Flow Experience,” 80.

that he needs to fill up the day, he means that he needs something to concentrate on. Creating a routine or ritual or two in order to accomplish these two things gave him a sense of agency in the midst of adversity.²⁴⁷

Christopher Burney is another example of someone who utilized flow. Burney was held in solitary confinement by the Nazis during World War II.²⁴⁸ “So we set on a train a wonderful flow of combinations and associations in our minds, the length and complexity of which soon obscure its humble starting point. ...My bed, for example, could be measured and roughly classified with school beds or army beds, according to appearance...”²⁴⁹ Burney was able to occupy his mind and fill the passage of time with flow experiences.

While in prison, Aleksandr Solzenitsyn recalls the mental activities of a fellow prisoner.²⁵⁰ “He resisted by striving to use his mind to calculate distances. In Lefortovo [prison] he counted steps, converted them into kilometers, remembered from a map how many kilometers it was from Moscow to the border, and then how many across all Europe, and how many across the Atlantic Ocean.”²⁵¹ The flow experience in mathematical engagement served as tool of resistance and survival.

Papillon, another individual who utilized flow during a stressful situation, was in French Guiana as a prisoner in solitary confinement.²⁵² Like Solzenitsyn he would do difficult calculations to engage his mind. “One year equals three hundred and sixty-five days, two years, seven hundred and thirty days, unless one’s a leap year. I smiled at the thought. One more day

²⁴⁷ Logan, “Flow Experience,” 80.

²⁴⁸ Logan, “Flow Experience,” 81.

²⁴⁹ Logan, “Flow Experience,” 81.

²⁵⁰ Logan, “Flow Experience,” 82.

²⁵¹ Logan, “Flow Experience,” 82.

²⁵² Logan, “Flow Experience,” 82.

wouldn't matter much. The hell it would not. One day more is twenty four hours more."²⁵³ The engagement in calculations even made Papillon smile and helped take his mind out of his present environment.

In solitary confinement, a person loses freedom. Freedom is one of the major components of a life that is fulfilling.²⁵⁴ "Yet, paradoxically, a key feature of the flow experience, in which state people feel so free, is 'centering attention on a limited stimulus field,' a major feature of confinement."²⁵⁵ While in confinement, a person can maintain the freedom of their minds. A small setting that is confined could also allow a person to concentrate on one subject.²⁵⁶

The flow experience also leads persons to abandon their egos. This occurrence is one that has been experienced by many who are able to survive horrendous conditions. Admiral Byrd is one of them. While in the Antarctic, he endured four months of nights that lasted 24 hours, along with isolation, freezing temperatures, and starvation – all while alone in a small hut. He was, nevertheless, focused enough to create activities to keep himself occupied as well as schedules and rituals.²⁵⁷ "It was enough to catch that rhythm, momentarily to be myself a part of it. In an instant I could feel no doubt of man's oneness with the universe."²⁵⁸ His connection with all things is what kept his spirit alive. Byrd had related that after doing his daily activities he had the satisfaction of finally having one hour of his own.²⁵⁹

²⁵³ Logan, "Flow Experience," 82.

²⁵⁴ Logan, "Flow Experience," 83.

²⁵⁵ Logan, "Flow Experience," 83.

²⁵⁶ Logan, "Flow Experience," 83.

²⁵⁷ Logan, "Flow Experience," 84-85.

²⁵⁸ Logan, "Flow Experience," 85.

²⁵⁹ Logan, "Flow Experience," 85.

Flow's role in creativity and healing after a traumatic event is shown in Einat S. Metzl's article titled "The Role of Creative Thinking in Resilience After Hurricane Katrina." The hypothesis of the study was that creative thinking would in some way assist in knowledge of resilience for those who had survived hurricane Katrina.²⁶⁰

Research within the last thirty years has shown that resilience is multi-faceted and is determined by contexts, internal changes, and external changes.²⁶¹ There are three dominant definitions of resilience according to Everall, Altrows, and Paulson:²⁶²

(a) a stable personality trait or ability protecting individuals from negative effects of risk and adversity; (b) a positive outcome, which is defined by the presence of positive mental health (such as positive self concept and self esteem, academic achievement, success at age-appropriate developmental tasks, etc.) or absence of psychopathology, despite the exposure to risk; or (c) a dynamic process that is dependent upon interactions between individual and contextual variables, and which evolves over time.²⁶³

Part of being resilient is the ability to focus on the positive.

Flow also appears as a factor that is relevant to resilience models through creativity.²⁶⁴ "The concept of flow was found to enhance the personal well-being of the person engaging in the creative activity. ...Recent creativity research supports the usefulness of everyday creative problem solving and creative functioning, openness, nondefensiveness, and bravery as facilitators in responding to unavoidable adversity."²⁶⁵ Likewise, the qualitative component of the study showed that creativity was a factor in resilience.²⁶⁶ Three main elements of creativity

²⁶⁰ Einat S. Metzl, "The Role of Creative Thinking in Resilience After Hurricane Katrina," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 3, no. 2 (2009): 112.

²⁶¹ Metzl, "Role," 112.

²⁶² Metzl, "Role," 112.

²⁶³ Metzl, "Role," 112-113.

²⁶⁴ Metzl, "Role," 113.

²⁶⁵ Metzl, "Role," 113.

²⁶⁶ Metzl, "Role," 120.

were dominant. Those three elements are: “flexible thinking and originality, making art as a way of processing events, and partaking in New Orleans’ cultural traditions.”²⁶⁷ Creativity allowed people to feel a sense of well-being and helped them heal.

In terms of flexible thinking, one survivor, Jan, talks about observing that people who think more linearly had a harder time coping with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. “I feel that people who are extremely linear have really been hit extra hard by this. I really see it every day. I really do believe since the core of my process is very freewheeling and just figure it out as it comes along, that that has been a very, very important tool to survival and resilience.”²⁶⁸ The ability to adapt to extreme change was crucial to Jan’s healing process.

Another survivor had found art making helpful as a way of coping with the trauma of Hurricane Katrina. She talks about an artifact sodden from the flooding.

It got new life, [but] on the backside of it, I didn’t clean it up. I kept it with the water line. So that was very symbolic because it was almost like there’s hope, or you can take something beautiful out of it. But I still wanted to keep the fact that this is something that was in the storm that is now a piece of artwork.²⁶⁹

In the form of art, something that was a symbol of tragedy, became a thing of beauty and strength.

A third survivor that was interviewed found it to be a healing experience to go to a New Orleans cultural event. The leader of a three-person procession really made an impression on Katherine. The leader was wearing cleaning gear such as yellow gloves and a cleaning mask.²⁷⁰ “I felt it was the rising again of this person that had been beat down with their masks and ecotreatment, cleaning treatment, leading the procession; that was a really good moment. We

²⁶⁷ Metzl, “Role,” 120.

²⁶⁸ Metzl, “Role,” 120.

²⁶⁹ Metzl, “Role,” 120.

²⁷⁰ Metzl, “Role,” 120.

definitely shared these things and it was like, oh yeah, we're totally coming back."²⁷¹ Cleaning apparel were used as source of pride in the New Orleans parade. The sentiment of pride was infectious.

In the article, "Purposeful Self: Accessing Sensory Motifs as Empowerment in Flow States and Clinical Interventions," Don J. Feeney, Jr. brings a sense of agency to individuals and restores meaning to their lives. In order to access meaning, Feeney says that we must pay attention to our sensory systems as they appear in states of flow.²⁷² "An individual's purpose is primarily expressed in what may be called a sensory motif, a unique way of combining and organizing his or her senses manifesting that person's unique character. Sensory motifs are highly visible in flow states."²⁷³ For Feeney, the focus on living a life of vitality is contingent upon how well they know themselves through their senses. Feeney's conclusion is that persons need to be able to understand and find their own sensory motif in order to find meaning and purpose in their lives.²⁷⁴

Feeney suggests that clients are more empowered when they get in touch with their sensory motifs. This is when a client is in a flow state.²⁷⁵ "The sense of purpose experienced in flow states that resonate with the client's sensory motif encourages suspension of preconceived ideas or expectations. Clients can then fully enjoy and use sensory motifs in creative and therapeutic capacities."²⁷⁶ In flow, clients are able to move away from negative thoughts or

²⁷¹ Metzl, "Role," 120.

²⁷² Don J. Feeney, Jr. "Purposeful Self: Accessing Sensory Motifs as Empowerment in Flow States and Clinical Interventions," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 36 (1996): 94.

²⁷³ Feeney, "Purposeful Self," 94.

²⁷⁴ Feeney, "Purposeful Self," 94.

²⁷⁵ Feeney, "Purposeful Self," 95.

²⁷⁶ Feeney, "Purposeful Self," 95.

limiting beliefs. Concentration on the task at hand enables the patient to focus on positivity and fulfillment at each moment of engagement.

As Feeney holds, there are hardships and traumas in our lives as both children and adults. These traumas could be perceived as obstacles to healthy development. But it is still possible for the sense of meaning and purpose to be found in the midst of traumatizing events.²⁷⁷ “it is that immutable sensory motif that empowers each person to dare to risk and move through their terrors. It is their motif that allows them to enter a flow experience, discovering meaning and purpose in their adversity.”²⁷⁸ Flow can be added on to programs that help heal people and allow them to move beyond that which holds them back from a life of fulfillment.²⁷⁹ The sensory motif is also what makes a person re-engage their deepest self. As Csikszentmihalyi suggests, flow happens when one concentrates and improves a particular skill and thus feels fully alive.²⁸⁰

It is evident that creativity and flow are related to play and meaningful experiences. Flow experiences likewise help persons to access sensory motifs of organization and design. Bohart and others show that responses through empathy that concentrate on a possible future promote a client’s sense of agency in solving problems.²⁸¹ “Helping clients keep an eye on their vision of the future in terms of what would be right for them facilitates the working-through process. This emphasis on what feels right (the flow state of motif) can empower change processes.”²⁸² Results of engagement with flow activities seem to move toward a sense of agency.

²⁷⁷ Feeney, “Purposeful Self,” 100.

²⁷⁸ Feeney, “Purposeful Self,” 100.

²⁷⁹ Feeney, “Purposeful Self,” 100.

²⁸⁰ Feeney, “Purposeful Self,” 104.

²⁸¹ Feeney, “Purposeful Self,” 104-105.

²⁸² Feeney, “Purposeful Self,” 105.

Earlier, I had mentioned the case study of Caterina and how flow helped in her healing process. I will now go into greater detail of this case study utilizing Marten deVries' edited work, *The Experience of Psychopathology: Investigating Mental Disorders in Their Natural Settings*.

Caterina is single and twenty-five years of age. Her place of birth is Southern Italy. She has a sister that is two years older, and a brother that is four years younger than she, making her second in the birth order. She and her family moved to Milan when she was five years old, where she still lives with the rest of her family. Her father passed away due to illness in December of 1986.²⁸³

Caterina was greatly influenced by her culture in terms of education. She was not allowed to go to school; that would have necessitated a train trip, and her culture perceived it as taboo for a woman to take a train alone for fear that she might be raped.²⁸⁴ "Caterina's cultural education may be evidenced in her agoraphobic symptoms, such as her fear of being alone in public places, fear of falling in the street and of developing breathlessness and tachycardia in crowded places."²⁸⁵ Caterina showed that she had beliefs about the world outside her home. The outside world was highly threatening.

Her therapist suggested she undertake activities that would trigger flow experiences, which in turn would give her a healthier outlook on life.²⁸⁶ The results are indicated further on in this account. "The application of optimal experience theory in psychotherapy is centered on reinforcing both the patient's personal search for challenging possibilities for action in daily life, and his/her effort to develop personal skills in order to meet these challenges and not avoid

²⁸³ Marten deVries, ed., *The Experience of Psychopathology: Investigating Mental Disorders in Their Natural Settings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 281.

²⁸⁴ De Vries, *Experience*, 281.

²⁸⁵ De Vries, *Experience*, 281.

²⁸⁶ De Vries, *Experience*, 282-283.

them.”²⁸⁷ Here, the flow experience is included in a therapy setting to support a person’s ability to govern their own lives in a positive manner.

The results of having more active flow experiences in Caterina’s life were visible. In terms of activities, she watched less TV and her new activities took more of her time and produced flow experiences.²⁸⁸ These activities included “White Cross volunteering, reading, studying English, attending to the driver’s license course and socializing with friends.”²⁸⁹ Caterina’s alone time marked significant improvement in her recovery and healing. As a result, “there is a remarkable increase in the time Caterina spends alone...This result underlines the improving capacity of Caterina to be alone, and her diminished need for social support particularly in relation to her fear of traveling and walking alone in the street.”²⁹⁰ Caterina’s recovery was very evident as she was no longer exhibiting signs of distress when she was in public settings.

Other results include Caterina’s mental states. Caterina had previously spent much of the time thinking of herself, the past, the future, her complaints relating to her mental condition, and even her better moods. She evolved to the point where she spent more time thinking about volunteering at the White Cross. Thoughts of watching TV had lessened significantly.²⁹¹

There was also a positive correlation between her thoughts and her activities. She was able to concentrate on a given task much more than before and increased her daily activities.²⁹² “The congruence between what a subject is thinking and what he [or she] is doing is an

²⁸⁷ De Vries, *Experience*, 283.

²⁸⁸ De Vries, *Experience*, 284.

²⁸⁹ De Vries, *Experience*, 284-285.

²⁹⁰ De Vries, *Experience*, 285.

²⁹¹ De Vries, *Experience*, 285.

²⁹² De Vries, *Experience*, 285.

important variable which characterizes the quality of experience. It is an indicator of the focusing of attention on the activity, which in the frame of 'Flow Theory' is one of the key dimensions for optimal experience, as well as characteristic of wellbeing in pathological samples."²⁹³ Caterina's engagement in flow activities were an indicator of how well she was recovering.

The change in how she spent her time also affected the highs and lows of her experiences. When she began therapy, her reports of extremely negative states predominated and only a small number of activities were routine for her.²⁹⁴ "Her involvement in more complex, challenging, and socially valuable activities, such as White Cross volunteering, and the development of the other new activities resulted in a more positive quality of her experience."²⁹⁵ Improvement of her condition heightened as she progressed to higher levels of flow activities.

The therapy that Caterina received was focused on self motivation and her own interests, in essence a program for her to pursue and attain flow experiences.²⁹⁶

The Case of Caterina also demonstrates the power of positive psychological processes, such as enjoyment and creativity. These issues should be central to treatment that enables the subject to find more positive experiences in daily life and develop new life styles in a positive and constructive manner.²⁹⁷

Caterina's case is a testament that the healing affects of flow can also be included in a psychiatric setting.

Conclusion

²⁹³ De Vries, *Experience*, 286.

²⁹⁴ De Vries, *Experience*, 286.

²⁹⁵ De Vries, *Experience*, 286.

²⁹⁶ De Vries, *Experience*, 289.

²⁹⁷ De Vries, *Experience*, 289.

In this chapter I have covered some psychological aspects of flow. I reviewed some conditions that need to be present for such optimal human experience to occur, and showed the results of flow on the human psyche. Finally, I provided some examples of how flow can be utilized in the healing and recovery of trauma and its potential use in psychoanalysis.

Chapter Three

Spirituality, Spiritual Formation, and Spiritual Practices

This chapter lays the groundwork for what is meant first by spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual practices, and second and more specifically by what is meant by spiritual practices as one type of flow in recovery from trauma. This chapter not only lays the groundwork for understanding these terms and concepts, it also reviews the literature that is available on these topics.

First, those who write on theories of spirituality and spiritual formation include Mel Lawrenz, Maxie Dunnam, Roger S. Gottlieb, Michael Downey, and Michael Cox. In the area of spiritual practices, I draw upon the works of Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and Teresa Blythe. Each author has suggestions of spiritual practices and ways in which they articulate the place of spiritual practices in our lives. The works were selected for their range of understandings of spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual practices.

Spirituality and Spiritual Formation

Mel Lawrenz defines spiritual formation as “the progressive patterning of a person’s inner and outer life according to the image of Christ through intentional means of spiritual growth.”²⁹⁸ So, with terms like “*transformation*, *re-formed*, and *conformed*,” we experience “*transformation*.” It is through form that God creates. And living in a broken world, God’s salvation is what can be known as “*transformation*.” Through the church, people are “*re-formed*” from their broken lives in the person of Jesus. People are conformed to the likeness of

²⁹⁸ Mel Lawrenz, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 15.

Jesus, not to the likeness of the world.²⁹⁹ “Disciples of Jesus are those who are continually being reshaped in thought, word, and deed. Spiritual growth as is the case with any kind of healthy growth, follows a certain form. It is not random, accidental, or arbitrary.”³⁰⁰ Progress in the spiritual life is determined by how we are continually being shaped by the Spirit.

For Lawrenz, there are several ways in which souls can be shaped. The first is through preaching and teaching, through which a teacher/preacher enters people’s lives, to assist in resolutions, to guide people in living according to good values, and to soften their hearts. The second way is through pastoral counseling where one or both souls are becoming better people in a confidential space. The third way people are shaped is through worship, through the community of faith gathering intentionally to be with the Sacred. Fourth, prayer helps shape a soul through communication with God. Fifth, fellowship helps shape a soul by way of encouragement and for people to hold each other to be accountable. Sixth, through service, people are shaped by helping to heal social stresses with God’s help.³⁰¹

Lawrenz holds that there are seven principles of spiritual formation: First, that spiritual formation has existed since the beginning of Christianity; second, that spiritual formation has to be a regular part of all people’s lives, and not only for the elite; third, that God’s Word, community, and disciplines are all means that God employs to help form people; fourth, God has suggested various disciplines to help form people, such as scripture reading; fifth, a person’s disposition and attitude are taken into consideration in matters of spiritual formation; sixth, spiritual formation is a very personal subject, yet it is not to be separated from community;

²⁹⁹ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 15.

³⁰⁰ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 15.

³⁰¹ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 19.

seventh, communities are able to guide people toward good, solid values that are helpful in spiritual formation.³⁰²

According to Lawrenz, there are four different types of Christian spirituality: the Activist Approach, where the focus is on action, engagement, visibility, and where the pursuit of God is seen as holy; the Contemplative Approach, which focuses on quietism, withdrawal, hiddenness, and pursuing God as love; the Intellectual Approach that is comprised of intelligibility, analysis, activity, and that pursues God as truth; and finally the Mystical Approach that focuses on ineffability, intuition, passivity, and pursuing God as one.³⁰³ Even within the same person, these approaches can overlap.³⁰⁴ “Whatever one’s spiritual temperament,” writes Lawrenz, “the basic facts are constant: We are dead in sin, rebirth by the Spirit of God is the only path to spiritual life, and that life must develop in a lifelong process of growth, integration, and transformation.”³⁰⁵ We are ever changing throughout the course of our lives where our constant focus is how to live as children of God.

Spiritual development is a process of growth,³⁰⁶ much as in the world of nature. The subject of growth is seen in the New Testament many times over.³⁰⁷ “These and other pictures of God as grower demonstrate that God’s way of doing things in this world is *process*. Miracles, as the *extraordinary* speeding up of process, show that God is powerful enough to do whatever he wants however he wants.”³⁰⁸ We understand that by knowing scripture, we are able to determine

³⁰² Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 22.

³⁰³ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 27.

³⁰⁴ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 27.

³⁰⁵ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 28.

³⁰⁶ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 30.

³⁰⁷ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 30.

³⁰⁸ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 30.

that change is part of the spiritual life. By seeing growth in terms of the way the world is, we understand how it is that God chooses to present God's self to us.³⁰⁹ When we're adamant about the idea that spiritual formation happens only when crisis hits, we set limitations on God and ignore God's choices.³¹⁰

Growth in the spiritual life can be understood in several ways.³¹¹ First, only God can be the author of our spiritual lives. No one else can be responsible for the miracles of birth and growth.³¹² Second, "We must not limit how God works to convert and sanctify people, but should be awed at his sovereign power to produce growth."³¹³ Our focus should be on a God that governs the soul toward God's own self. Third, God makes us a part of this process. Fourth, growth can only occur through time. No one's spiritual formation can ever be forced on them and it always occurs over time. Fifth, in order for growth to occur, there must be care and nourishment. Without that, growth cannot occur. Sixth, growth helps to shape people.³¹⁴ Seventh, "[j]ust as the body's growth includes the knitting together of different kinds of tissues, spiritual growth involves the coordination of all of our inner faculties—our thinking, feeling, and willing."³¹⁵ Growth is visible when there is less sin, when by imitating Christ we grow in salvation.³¹⁶

³⁰⁹ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 30.

³¹⁰ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 30.

³¹¹ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 32.

³¹² Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 32.

³¹³ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 32.

³¹⁴ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 33.

³¹⁵ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 33.

³¹⁶ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 33.

When we grow, our knowledge, experience, and maturity increase. This is what we can refer to as formation.³¹⁷ “It is a process of *integrating* all aspects of life, and even when *crisis* breaks us down, God’s grace is there to put the pieces back together in brand new forms.”³¹⁸ Here is where God brings church to people and helps to shape souls.³¹⁹

Spiritual formation is important because it is God’s initial intention and plan. Transformation does not just happen randomly. Transformation is the ongoing faithful process of salvation.³²⁰ “This is the heart of spiritual formation—the intentional, heart sustained re-patterning of a person’s life after the pattern set out by God when he created human beings in his image, but made possible only by divine transforming power.”³²¹ In God’s infinite wisdom, we possess the ability to move toward and be led by God.

Maxie Dunnam suggests that the key to Christian spirituality is, “to be *alive in Christ*.”³²² Christ within us is what we must seek and experience first-hand.³²³ So, Dunnam focuses on Paul’s justification by grace through faith and the indwelling Christ. Paul introduces us to Christ as one who is within us as the secret to all living human beings:³²⁴ “And the secret is simply this: “Christ *in you!* Yes, Christ *in you* bringing with him the hope of all the glorious things to come” (Col. 1:27 Phillips).³²⁵ Dunnam suggests that Christ can be found inside of all of us.

³¹⁷ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 45.

³¹⁸ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 45.

³¹⁹ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 45.

³²⁰ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 144.

³²¹ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 145.

³²² Maxie Dunnam, *Alive in Christ: The Dynamic Process of Spiritual Formation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 13.

³²³ Dunnam, *Alive*, 13.

³²⁴ Dunnam, *Alive*, 19.

³²⁵ Dunnam, *Alive*, 19.

Paul's letter to the Romans is suggestive of the life he himself lived in Christ.³²⁶ "In Galatians 2:20 he says, 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'"³²⁷ Paul reminds us that it is only in Christ's death that Christ is able to live on in all of us. Christ could not be with all of us at the same time in human form. He had to die in order live as the Spirit within us.

Dunnam thus defines spiritual formation as, "that dynamic process of receiving through faith and appropriating through commitment, discipline, and action, the living Christ into our own life to the end that our life will conform to, and manifest the reality of Christ's presence in the world."³²⁸ There is a certain amount of intentionality in Dunnam's definition of spiritual formation. We must live with the intention to bring Christ into the here and now.

He describes prayer, or prayerful living as he prefers to call it, as

recognizing, cultivating awareness of, and giving expression to the indwelling Christ. ...Through meditation, reflection, living with scripture, corporate worship, intentional relationship and conversation with others, and other spiritual disciplines, we cultivate our awareness of Christ's presence within us.³²⁹

These are the ways we make ourselves more in tune with God. In expressing Christ within us, we are a reflection of his life every day of our lives. In this sense, we are expressing our being in order to have the Spirit of Christ working through us in our being.³³⁰ "Then that fantastic and

³²⁶ Dunnam, *Alive*, 20.

³²⁷ Dunnam, *Alive*, 20.

³²⁸ Dunnam, *Alive*, 26.

³²⁹ Dunnam, *Alive*, 26.

³³⁰ Dunnam, *Alive*, 26.

thrilling rubric for our lives will become a viable possibility: *we will be Christ to, and/or receive Christ from every person we meet.*³³¹ We are all in Christ's presence in relation to one another.

In describing spirituality and spiritual formation, Roger S. Gottlieb draws from his own personal experience, Christian mystics, Islamic Sufis, the Dalai Lama, and other spiritual teachers.³³² Gottlieb uses the “terms and phrases spirituality, spiritual teachings, spiritual perspectives, and the like – to refer to pretty much the same thing: an understanding of life, the attempt to live by that understanding, and the experiences to which that attempt gives rise.”³³³ For Gottlieb, spirituality involves a dual movement: away from spiritual emptiness, toward spiritual fullness.³³⁴

Through the times of suffering and void we experience as humans, we are to apply the spiritual virtues of “mindfulness or awareness, acceptance and equanimity, gratitude and generosity, compassion, and loving connection to other people, nature, and God.”³³⁵ These virtues are based on the fundamental understanding in spirituality that it is only through the practice of the virtues when confronted with adversities in life that a person may attain a sense of lasting serenity and all that is good. Practicing the virtues will profit the person who exercises them as well as those associated with that person.³³⁶ We were made to live out the spiritual virtues.³³⁷

³³¹ Dunnam, *Alive*, 26.

³³² Roger S. Gottlieb, *Spirituality: What it is and Why it Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

³³³ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 5-6.

³³⁴ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 7.

³³⁵ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 8.

³³⁶ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 8-9.

³³⁷ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 9.

In regard to attachments, what happens is that people tend to hold on to that which are fleeting in this life. Those attachments only lead a person to want more.³³⁸ “The entire pattern of attachment is a fundamental mistake. ...a spiritual life...does require faith that it is possible to overcome this pattern.”³³⁹ We need faith in order to rise above temporary earthly pleasures. We must remember that Jesus is not of this world, and neither should we be of this world.

When we step out of our personal identities and egos, we are more likely to be able to experience those spiritual moments. We are able to see those moments of joy, wonder, and excitement that are in our lives.³⁴⁰ At one point, those moments were also a big part of who we were.³⁴¹

Thus, the most common features of spirituality seem to be “acceptance of reality rather than resistance to it, gratitude rather than greed for more, compassionate connection to other people rather than isolation, and a profound, joyous, nongrASPing enjoyment of life.”³⁴² Moments of unselfish kindness, when you are the one most likely to need it, or the choice of gratefulness before entitlement, common human experience over difference—all these are examples of the spiritual. The spiritual being pursues spiritual virtues.³⁴³

And these virtues are natural to human beings (though, sadly, many other things are natural as well). That is why spirituality is universal, why it can, and does, happen at any time and to anyone. ...To be a spiritual person, then, is simply to see the value of spiritual virtues and seek to make them increasingly important in your life.³⁴⁴

³³⁸ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 12.

³³⁹ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 12.

³⁴⁰ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 13.

³⁴¹ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 13.

³⁴² Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 13.

³⁴³ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 13.

³⁴⁴ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 13-14.

The spiritual virtues need to be integrated and expressed in a way that brings the fullness of life into the world.

Having a sense of mindfulness is another way we can suppress immediate responses to life's surprises and situations. Through mindfulness, one observes the mind's musings and temperament.³⁴⁵ A common mindfulness practice is as follows:

Seated in a comfortable position, we place our initial attention on our breath – the rise and fall of the chest or the spot at the base of the nose where breath enters the body—and for the next ten, twenty, or sixty minutes, we witness what the mind does. There will be memories, fantasies, obsessions, lingering resentments³⁴⁶

and we allow ourselves to experience them all and then let the unhelpful ones go. Our attentiveness to the vast range of our thinking helps us to see how much of it is really a compilation of beliefs that are a distortion void of any reflection, and therefore ultimately unhelpful.³⁴⁷

Practicing mindfulness can help us to be more tolerant about those emotions that are uncomfortable and to be more reasonable and intelligent in our actions. Mindfulness helps to decrease our anxiety by helping us be less rigid and more free in our thinking and actions.³⁴⁸ Mindfulness can ease tensions as the spiritual virtues are observed.³⁴⁹

At the heart of contentment is gratitude, and this is central to our spiritual lives.³⁵⁰ “In gratitude, we find an experience, a day-by-day practice, and a way of life. It is a feeling that

³⁴⁵ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 23.

³⁴⁶ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 23-24.

³⁴⁷ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 24.

³⁴⁸ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 25.

³⁴⁹ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 25.

³⁵⁰ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 25.

arises spontaneously within us, something we can consciously cultivate, and a habitual response that shapes our actions.”³⁵¹ For gratitude first helps us to appreciate all that exists before us.³⁵²

Through gratitude, we are able to see the gift in all that we have. Gratitude helps us remember and appreciate all that is.³⁵³ Yet gratitude demands a deliberate effort. It is easy to get caught up in all the negatives in our surroundings.³⁵⁴

The results of living with a sense of gratitude are many. The internal state of a grateful person is that of contentment and the ability to find positives in the midst of the negative.³⁵⁵ With gratitude, a person becomes the better version of their own selves and can access genuine appreciation for the successes of others. Gratitude can also increase a sense of empathy for those that suffer.³⁵⁶

For Michael Downey, spirituality broadly “refers to the deep desire of the human heart for personal integration in light of levels of reality not immediately apparent, as well as those experiences, events, and efforts which contribute to such integration.”³⁵⁷ Christian spirituality is “living the Christian life in and through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. ...[it is the] ... integration of mind, body, and soul.”³⁵⁸ Karl Rahner suggests that Christian spirituality is a distinct way of being that humanity shares in the pursuit and longing “for integration and completion through self-transcending knowledge, freedom, and love.”³⁵⁹ For Downey,

³⁵¹ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 25.

³⁵² Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 26.

³⁵³ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 26.

³⁵⁴ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 26.

³⁵⁵ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 26.

³⁵⁶ Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 26-27.

³⁵⁷ Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 26.

³⁵⁸ Downey, *Understanding*, 49.

³⁵⁹ Downey, *Understanding*, 49.

wholeness of the individual is the key not only to spirituality in general, but also to Christian spirituality.

Downey has formulated principles to guide Christians who seek to live in the Spirit of Christ: (1) Spirituality is the Christian life in the presence of the Holy Spirit in conformity to Jesus Christ.³⁶⁰ (2) God is known in relationship with us.³⁶¹ “As a result, prayer, religious discipline, celebration in word and sacrament, spiritual growth and maturation, all rest on the action and presence of God in our regard.”³⁶² God is in all of the practices we participate in as we grow to be like Jesus. (3) Christian spirituality must be anchored in Christ’s story.³⁶³ (4) Christian spirituality is participation in the life of God through Word and Spirit, being love. Call to deeper communion with God is also call to deeper communion with others.³⁶⁴ (5) “Christian spirituality develops through the life of prayer, which is the ongoing cultivation of relationship with God rooted in God’s being toward us.”³⁶⁵ Prayer is needed in order for there to be a means of communication with God. (6) Christian holiness means that we grow to be our authentic selves in all of our humanity, made to be unified with God.³⁶⁶ (7) “Christian spirituality involves attention to many dimensions of the human person and of the God-world relation ... contemporary spirituality ... is inclusive of the social, political, and economic realms; in a word, every dimension of personal and communal life is involved in a Christian spirituality.”³⁶⁷ There

³⁶⁰ Downey, *Understanding*, 146.

³⁶¹ Downey, *Understanding*, 146.

³⁶² Downey, *Understanding*, 147.

³⁶³ Downey, *Understanding*, 147.

³⁶⁴ Downey, *Understanding*, 147.

³⁶⁵ Downey, *Understanding*, 147.

³⁶⁶ Downey, *Understanding*, 147.

³⁶⁷ Downey, *Understanding*, 147-148.

is no aspect of our lives where Christian spirituality is separate.³⁶⁸ (9) Christian spirituality is based on equanimity.³⁶⁹ (10) Christian spirituality calls for social solidarity and justice.³⁷⁰ (11) Spiritual disciplines help increase participation in divine life.³⁷¹ (12) Active and contemplative forms of spirituality should not be separate from and exclusive of each other. Both forms are needed to have a balanced spirituality.³⁷² (13) Insights from diverse religious traditions, cultures, and ecumenical dialogues need to find commonalities.³⁷³ (14) In the case of creation, stewardship is needed for ecological care.³⁷⁴ (15) Contemplative prayer is important in Christian spirituality and is the place where transformation of the spirit takes place.³⁷⁵

In his *Handbook of Christian Spirituality*, Michael Cox concentrates mainly on mysticism. The general definition of mysticism is “the direct personal experience of Ultimate Reality, of God.”³⁷⁶ Patmore suggests mysticism in terms of a science of its own. “It is a science in an absolute sense, being the passionate and all-consuming quest for supreme and perfect *knowledge*, for the Ultimate Reality philosophy calls Truth and theology acknowledges as God.”³⁷⁷ Mysticism is seen as part pursuit and part experience in relation to God.

³⁶⁸ Downey, *Understanding*, 148.

³⁶⁹ Downey, *Understanding*, 148.

³⁷⁰ Downey, *Understanding*, 148-149.

³⁷¹ Downey, *Understanding*, 149.

³⁷² Downey, *Understanding*, 149.

³⁷³ Downey, *Understanding*, 149.

³⁷⁴ Downey, *Understanding*, 149-150.

³⁷⁵ Downey, *Understanding*, 150.

³⁷⁶ Michael Cox, *Handbook of Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 14.

³⁷⁷ Cox, *Handbook*, 19.

Michael Cox suggests, for the true mystic, any inability to verbalize the experience is quickly minimized by the certainty of what she or he has experienced. She is secure in what she now knows to be true.³⁷⁸ “The mystic therefore tells [her or] his story with absolute assurance: [she or] he *knows* what others simply believe.”³⁷⁹ The mystic is certain of God’s reality by sheer evidence. At its core, mystical experience is “the intuitive acquisition of knowledge that is inaccessible to rational understanding.”³⁸⁰ Through rationalism, we are unable to get to the essence of something, hence, the necessity of a vision that is intellectual. It is not the case, though, that Mysticism deals with knowledge that is symbolic in nature.³⁸¹ Mysticism falls on spirituality in pursuit of the Sacred.³⁸²

William James identifies four characteristics of mystical experiences. First, the mystical experience is ineffable, meaning that any and all verbal description is unattainable, and therefore, unutterable.³⁸³ Second, there is a noetic quality to such experiences.³⁸⁴ “Noetic (from the Greek *noetikos*) means ‘of the intellect’ and involves the idea of pure abstraction and of intellectual speculation motivated by feeling.”³⁸⁵ Third, there is a transient quality to the mystical experience. It is rare that it lasts very long, even though its effects can endure. The mystical experience can be frequent as well, and to a certain degree, can be controlled.³⁸⁶ Fourth and

³⁷⁸ Cox, *Handbook*, 20.

³⁷⁹ Cox, *Handbook*, 20.

³⁸⁰ Cox, *Handbook*, 21.

³⁸¹ Cox, *Handbook*, 21.

³⁸² Cox, *Handbook*, 21.

³⁸³ Cox, *Handbook*, 24.

³⁸⁴ Cox, *Handbook*, 25.

³⁸⁵ Cox, *Handbook*, 25.

³⁸⁶ Cox, *Handbook*, 26.

finally, passivity is another characteristic of the mystical experience.³⁸⁷ “The implication of this characteristic is that mystical states almost always bring with them the feeling of something *given*. At the highest level of [her or] his experience the mystic feels overwhelmed by a greater will than [her or] his own, which subsides temporarily into abeyance.”³⁸⁸ The mystic can lose all sense of the individual self as a separate being from another and is certain that they have received a great gift.

Spiritual Practices

Dallas Willard identifies disciplines in spiritual life as activities that help us cooperate with Jesus.³⁸⁹ “When we understand that grace (*charis*) is gift (*charisma*), we then see that to grow in grace is to grow in what is given to us of God and by God. The disciplines are then, in the clearest sense, a means to that grace and also to those gifts.”³⁹⁰ So, when through the disciplines I become a better Christian, this happens because the disciplines have made me more open to God’s grace and power. This is what happens when we engage ourselves in the disciplines.³⁹¹

The spiritual practices that we choose for ourselves are not necessarily right for everyone else. There does not need to be an exhaustive list of disciplines. Some practices are on a lot of lists historically. Some served all ages historically and others have been forgotten.³⁹² Willard

³⁸⁷ Cox, *Handbook*, 26.

³⁸⁸ Cox, *Handbook*, 26.

³⁸⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 156.

³⁹⁰ Willard, *Spirit*, 156.

³⁹¹ Willard, *Spirit*, 157.

³⁹² Willard, *Spirit*, 157.

lists those disciplines that have been used widely, have had a lasting effect on those who have used them, and have withstood the test of time.³⁹³ There are two main lists of disciplines. They are the Disciplines of Abstinence and the Disciplines of Engagement. The disciplines of abstinence he names are “solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice.” The disciplines of engagement are “study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission.”³⁹⁴

The disciplines of abstinence are those that bring us to the use of all God’s gifts with moderation and sobriety.³⁹⁵ W.R. Inge suggests that “we should steadily resolve to give up anything that comes between ourselves and God.”³⁹⁶ For the disciplines of abstinence help us to modify or abstain from what we usually identify as normal or legitimate needs or desires.³⁹⁷ Such “[n]ormal’ desires include our basic drives or motivations, such as those for food, sleep, bodily activity, companionship, curiosity, and sex. But our desires for convenience, comfort, material security, reputation or fame, and variety are also considered under this heading.”³⁹⁸ The disciplines of abstinence help us become less dependent on the accesses of life for happiness.

Though we may choose to abstain from the activities mentioned above, there is nothing inherently wrong with them. But in our modern day, at times we distort them and they become a source of sin through our own sense of rebellion against that which brings us closer to life.³⁹⁹

³⁹³ Willard, *Spirit*, 158.

³⁹⁴ Willard, *Spirit*, 158.

³⁹⁵ Willard, *Spirit*, 159.

³⁹⁶ W.R. Inge, *Goodness and Truth* (London: Mowbray, 1958): 76-77, quoted in Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 159.

³⁹⁷ Willard, *Spirit*, 159.

³⁹⁸ Willard, *Spirit*, 159.

³⁹⁹ Willard, *Spirit*, 159.

This becomes more evident when we look at the seven deadly sins of pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lasciviousness.⁴⁰⁰ “Each is a case of one or more legitimate desires gone wrong. An adequate course of spiritual discipline will single out those tendencies that may harm our walk with God.”⁴⁰¹ The disciplines of abstinence are meant to deepen our relationship with God, not to make us miserable. The real misery we may experience is separation from God if we neglect to observe the disciplines of abstinence.

Concerning the disciplines of abstinence, solitude refers to withdrawing from human interaction and any form of companionship.⁴⁰² “Solitude is choosing to be *alone* and to dwell on our experience of isolation from other human beings.”⁴⁰³ Silence is when we separate ourselves from any kind of sound that may distract us from God.⁴⁰⁴

Fasting is when we abstain from food and/or drink. “Actually fasting is one of the more important ways of practicing that self-denial required of *everyone* who would follow Christ (Matt. 16:24). In fasting, we learn how to suffer happily as we feast on God.”⁴⁰⁵ Fasting helps us focus more on God’s presence.

Frugality, in terms of the discipline of abstinence, is abstaining from the use of material things or currency that we have (when we have more of it than we actually need).⁴⁰⁶ O. Hardman asserts, “The Christian who has the ability to live luxuriously, but fasts from all extravagance, and practices simplicity in [her or] his dress, [her or] his home, and [her or] his

⁴⁰⁰ Willard, *Spirit*, 160.

⁴⁰¹ Willard, *Spirit*, 160.

⁴⁰² Willard, *Spirit*, 160.

⁴⁰³ Willard, *Spirit*, 160.

⁴⁰⁴ Willard, *Spirit*, 163.

⁴⁰⁵ Willard, *Spirit*, 167.

⁴⁰⁶ Willard, *Spirit*, 168.

whole manner of life, is, therefore rendering good service to society.”⁴⁰⁷ In the discipline of abstinence frugality can bring about a sense of equanimity with others.

Chastity means intentionally avoiding excessive thinking of or participating in a sexual way with others, including husbands and wives.⁴⁰⁸ Says Willard, “the practice of abstaining from sex and from indulging in sexual feelings and thoughts, and thus learning how to not be governed by them”⁴⁰⁹ allows for a measure of sanctity and honor.⁴¹⁰ In chastity, people maintain control of their desires.

Secrecy refers to abstaining from advertising any and all the good that we have done as well as any of our good qualities.⁴¹¹ Thomas à Kempis suggests, “He that seeketh no outward witness for himself, it appeareth openly that he hath committed himself all wholly to God.”⁴¹² Secrecy gives us the opportunity to share the good we do only with God.

Sacrifice as a discipline of abstinence refers to letting go of some aspect of our material security.⁴¹³ Willard suggests, sacrifice “is total abandonment to God, a stepping into the

⁴⁰⁷ O. Hardman, *The Ideals of Asceticism: An Essay in the Comparative Study of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1924): 211-12, quoted in Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 169.

⁴⁰⁸ Willard, *Spirit*, 170.

⁴⁰⁹ Willard, *Spirit*, 170.

⁴¹⁰ Willard, *Spirit*, 170.

⁴¹¹ Willard, *Spirit*, 172.

⁴¹² Thomas a Kempis, ed. Irwin Edman, *The Imitation of Christ*, in *The Consolations [sic] of Philosophy* (New York: Random House, Modern Library, 1943): 177, quoted in Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 173. Having later looked at Edman’s book, the correct title is *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

⁴¹³ Willard, *Spirit*, 175.

darkened abyss in the faith and hope that God will bear us up.”⁴¹⁴ Sacrifice lets us know what it means to lean on God with our whole heart.

The disciplines of engagement and the disciplines of abstinence are both necessary in the spiritual life,⁴¹⁵ for “the disciplines of abstinence counteract tendencies to sins of commission, and the disciplines of engagement counteract tendencies to sins of omission.”⁴¹⁶ It is through engagement rather than through withdrawal that we grow.⁴¹⁷

Through abstinence, we create the atmosphere for engagement. When we are occupied by the things of this world, our spirits become lifeless due to the absence of God and inappropriate relationships with others.⁴¹⁸ “A proper abstinence actually breaks the hold of improper engagements so that the soul can be properly engaged in and by God.”⁴¹⁹ Engagement helps us find ways we can be with a God that is relational.

The spiritual discipline of study calls us to engagement with scripture. This discipline of engagement is the opposite of the particular aspect of solitude that can be part of the discipline of abstinence.⁴²⁰ David Watson suggests, “If we feed our souls regularly on God’s word, several times each day, we should become robust spiritually ... Nothing is more important than hearing and obeying the word of God.”⁴²¹ Scripture teaches us how live like Christ.

⁴¹⁴ Willard, *Spirit*, 175.

⁴¹⁵ Willard, *Spirit*, 175.

⁴¹⁶ Willard, *Spirit*, 176.

⁴¹⁷ Willard, *Spirit*, 176.

⁴¹⁸ Willard, *Spirit*, 176.

⁴¹⁹ Willard, *Spirit*, 176.

⁴²⁰ Willard, *Spirit*, 176.

⁴²¹ David Watson, *Fear No Evil: A Personal Struggle with Cancer*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984): 39, quoted in Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 176-177.

Worship is another discipline of engagement.⁴²² “In worship we engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God through thought and the use of words, rituals, and symbols.”⁴²³ We not only worship with others, but also in the company of our own selves, alone. When we worship, we also show worthiness to God.⁴²⁴

In celebration, as an act of engagement, “we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world, *in conjunction with* our faith and confidence in God’s greatness, beauty, and goodness.”⁴²⁵ The focus is on the lives we have as well as the world around us in terms of God’s own hand in it.⁴²⁶

Service as a spiritual discipline of engagement is where we work to help others as well as promote God’s purposes through the use of our own resources and capabilities. “Service can be utilized as an act of love and compassion.”⁴²⁷ In service can engage in the work of social justice.

In prayer we carry on a conversation with God. We communicate with God through the depths of our hearts.⁴²⁸ Willard reminds us that “prayer almost always involves other disciplines and spiritual activities if it is to go well, especially study, meditation, and worship, and often solitude and fasting as well.”⁴²⁹ Prayer has many dimensions.

The spiritual discipline of fellowship is when “we engage in common activities of worship, study, prayer, celebration, and service with other disciples,”⁴³⁰ as Willard asserts. Each member of the community is given a gift from the spirit, coming together as one in the church.⁴³¹

⁴²² Willard, *Spirit*, 177.

⁴²³ Willard, *Spirit*, 177.

⁴²⁴ Willard, *Spirit*, 177.

⁴²⁵ Willard, *Spirit*, 179.

⁴²⁶ Willard, *Spirit*, 179.

⁴²⁷ Willard, *Spirit*, 182.

⁴²⁸ Willard, *Spirit*, 184.

⁴²⁹ Willard, *Spirit*, 184.

⁴³⁰ Willard, *Spirit*, 186.

As a spiritual discipline, confession happens in fellowship. Confession is where we trust another with the knowledge of our heaviest iniquities.⁴³² “This will nourish our faith in God’s provision for our needs through his people, our sense of being loved, and our humility before our brothers and sisters.”⁴³³ Confession purifies our soul.

Submission is a spiritual discipline of engagement in which one requests assistance from someone who is more experienced as a Christian.⁴³⁴ The more experienced soul “helps us to do the things we would like to do and refrain from the things we don’t want to do. They oversee the godly order in our souls as well as in our fellowship and in the surrounding body of Christ.”⁴³⁵ Submission reminds us that we are not alone in our struggle to follow Christ.

Richard J. Foster sees spiritual practices as a path that leads to spiritual growth. We are liberated by our spiritual disciplines.⁴³⁶ The spiritual disciplines help us to engage ourselves deeply beyond the surface of our day-to-day lives. It is during our day-to-day lives that the disciplines are exercised in the best way. The effects of the disciplines should be felt in our daily relationships.⁴³⁷

The disciplines put us in a place where God can transform our spirits from the inside out.⁴³⁸ “They are God’s means of grace. ...God has ordained the Disciplines of the spiritual life

⁴³¹ Willard, *Spirit*, 187.

⁴³² Willard, *Spirit*, 187.

⁴³³ Willard, *Spirit*, 187.

⁴³⁴ Willard, *Spirit*, 190.

⁴³⁵ Willard, *Spirit*, 190.

⁴³⁶ Richard Foster, *Celebration of the Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 1.

⁴³⁷ Foster, *Celebration*, 1.

⁴³⁸ Foster, *Celebration*, 6.

as the means by which we are placed where He [or She] can bless us.”⁴³⁹ The disciplines help us witness God’s work in our lives and in the lives of others.

Foster breaks the disciplines into three groups. The first group is the Inward Disciplines. They include meditation, prayer, fasting, and study.⁴⁴⁰ The second group is called the Outward Disciplines. They consist of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service.⁴⁴¹ In the third group are the Corporate Disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.⁴⁴²

The inward discipline of meditation calls us to be in God’s real presence. Meditation suggests to us that God is always present with us.⁴⁴³ “*All who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord are the universal priesthood of God and as such can enter the Holy of Holies and converse with the living God.*”⁴⁴⁴ Meditation helps us hear God.

Prayer is another inward discipline. For someone to pray also means for someone to change. Prayer is the way that God uses to bring about that change.⁴⁴⁵ “If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ.”⁴⁴⁶ Prayer reminds us of the goodness of God.

Fasting is another inward discipline. Fasting must always have God as its focus.⁴⁴⁷ “If our fasting is not unto God, we have failed. Physical benefits, success in prayer, the endowing

⁴³⁹ Foster, *Celebration*, 6.

⁴⁴⁰ Foster, *Celebration*, 13-66.

⁴⁴¹ Foster, *Celebration*, 69-122.

⁴⁴² Foster, *Celebration*, 125-171.

⁴⁴³ Foster, *Celebration*, 19.

⁴⁴⁴ Foster, *Celebration*, 19.

⁴⁴⁵ Foster, *Celebration*, 30.

⁴⁴⁶ Foster, *Celebration*, 30.

⁴⁴⁷ Foster, *Celebration*, 48.

with power and spiritual insights—these must never replace God as the center of our fasting.”⁴⁴⁸
Fasting can help purify the body, mind, and spirit.

The inward discipline of study transforms the student. In the book of Romans, Paul says that we can be made new by renewing our minds. The way this is so is by focusing on that which brings transformation to our minds.⁴⁴⁹

In group two, we find the outward disciplines. The first of these is simplicity. Foster suggests, “The Christian Discipline of simplicity is an *inward* reality that results in an *outward* life-style. Both the inward and outward aspects of simplicity are essential.”⁴⁵⁰ The change that comes about can be from the language one uses in terms of honesty and truth. The outward signs of status are no longer visible, because there is no need for them. The ability to attain those signs of status has not changed, but it is the principle of displaying them that has changed.⁴⁵¹

The second outward discipline is solitude. In solitude, there needs to be balance between time spent with others as well as time spent alone.⁴⁵² “Therefore we must seek out the recreating stillness of solitude if we want to be with others meaningfully. We must seek the fellowship and accountability of others if we want to be alone safely. We must cultivate both if we are to live in obedience.”⁴⁵³ Solitude can help us recharge in order to be social.

The outward discipline of submission is based upon self-denial.⁴⁵⁴ “Self-denial is simply a way of coming to understand that we do not have to have our own way. Our happiness is not

⁴⁴⁸ Foster, *Celebration*, 48.

⁴⁴⁹ Foster, *Celebration*, 54.

⁴⁵⁰ Foster, *Celebration*, 69.

⁴⁵¹ Foster, *Celebration*, 70.

⁴⁵² Foster, *Celebration*, 85.

⁴⁵³ Foster, *Celebration*, 85.

⁴⁵⁴ Foster, *Celebration*, 100.

dependent upon getting what we want.”⁴⁵⁵ In self-denial, we do not lose our identity, but actually find it. Peter did not lose his identity when Jesus called him as a disciple. Paradoxically he found himself by losing himself in Jesus.⁴⁵⁶

The outward discipline of service brings to mind how Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. By doing this Jesus changed what it means to be great. It might tend to be easier to handle self-denial than to be reduced to that which is ordinary, banal, and mundane.⁴⁵⁷ In service, we are liberated from the world’s definition of who is higher or lower in status.⁴⁵⁸ “Service enables us to say ‘no!’ to the world’s games of promotion and authority. It abolishes our need (and desire) for a ‘pecking order,’” says Foster.⁴⁵⁹ Service can help us expel pride.

In the corporate discipline of confession, we remember that God’s most central desire is to be merciful and forgiving. This is made manifest in Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection.⁴⁶⁰ “The focus and pride which cling to us like barnacles cling to others also. We are sinners together. In acts of mutual confession we release the power that heals. Our humanity is no longer denied but transformed.”⁴⁶¹ Confession helps us be at peace with God.

In the corporate discipline of worship, we find that we are brought back to the source of all life.⁴⁶² God’s real presence—or the Shekinah of God- is felt within the community of believers.⁴⁶³ Shekinah is “The glory or the radiance of God dwelling in the midst of His people.

⁴⁵⁵ Foster, *Celebration*, 99.

⁴⁵⁶ Foster, *Celebration*, 99.

⁴⁵⁷ Foster, *Celebration*, 110.

⁴⁵⁸ Foster, *Celebration*, 110-111.

⁴⁵⁹ Foster, *Celebration*, 110-111.

⁴⁶⁰ Foster, *Celebration*, 125.

⁴⁶¹ Foster, *Celebration*, 127.

⁴⁶² Foster, *Celebration*, 138.

⁴⁶³ Foster, *Celebration*, 138.

It denotes the immediate Presence of God as opposed to a God who is abstract or aloof.”⁴⁶⁴ In worship, God is alive in each and every one of us.

In the corporate discipline of guidance, there is the aspect of communal guidance as we saw in the early church,⁴⁶⁵ as well as spiritual direction.⁴⁶⁶ In spiritual direction, an individual is guided in the path or journey of everyday life in the Spirit.⁴⁶⁷ “A spiritual director must himself or herself be on the inward journey and be willing to share her or his own struggles and doubts. There needs to be a realization that together they are learning from Jesus, their present Teacher.”⁴⁶⁸ Guidance helps us feel less alone in our efforts to live and love as Christ did.

Celebration is the final corporate discipline.⁴⁶⁹ “Freedom from anxiety and care forms the basis for celebration. Because we know He cares for us we can cast all our care upon Him. God has turned our mourning into dancing.”⁴⁷⁰ Celebration is a time of joy.

Teresa A. Blythe brings prayer to life through practices from a diverse set of traditions and times. Her work is something of an instruction manual for different prayer practices. The forms of prayer that she offers as exercises include instructions, the background of the exercise, an introduction, a statement of intention, and helpful tips about the exercise. At the end of the book are instructions for leading groups. The different prayer practices focus on biblical reflections, basic contemplative practices, lectio divina, life reflections, discernment processes, body prayers, prayers of the imagination, reflections on media, and praying for others.

⁴⁶⁴ Foster, *Celebration*, 138.

⁴⁶⁵ Foster, *Celebration*, 151.

⁴⁶⁶ Foster, *Celebration*, 159.

⁴⁶⁷ Foster, *Celebration*, 160.

⁴⁶⁸ Foster, *Celebration*, 161.

⁴⁶⁹ Foster, *Celebration*, 164.

⁴⁷⁰ Foster, *Celebration*, 164.

Together, these prayer practices offer a deeper understanding of God in our lives.⁴⁷¹ The goal of prayer is not to achieve some sort of mystical experience, but to exercise the joy that God brings to us in our mundane, everyday lives.⁴⁷² The prayer practices should be approached with reverence.⁴⁷³

The prayer practices might bring about a movement in our awareness of God.⁴⁷⁴ It is also important to remember that prayer can be difficult at times. But this is so perhaps because we are healing from an old wound, or because we are becoming more aware of our shadow, those parts of ourselves that we may not like to see or admit we have.⁴⁷⁵

It is good to start the practices with a sense of adventure, being open to both the positive and negative experiences one may have.⁴⁷⁶ Some advice is helpful here: “If the road of spiritual practice produces anxiety or a feeling of being in too deep, don’t despair or stop praying. Consult with a trusted, spiritually mature friend, a pastor, or a spiritual director about what you are experiencing.”⁴⁷⁷ The spiritual path is not always easy, but it is a journey that anyone who is serious about their relationship with God must take. What can help us through this journey are the companions we meet along the way.

⁴⁷¹ Teresa A. Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray: Practices From Many Traditions and Times* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 13.

⁴⁷² Blythe, 50, 13.

⁴⁷³ Blythe, 50, 13.

⁴⁷⁴ Blythe, 50, 13.

⁴⁷⁵ Blythe, 50, 14.

⁴⁷⁶ Blythe, 50, 14.

⁴⁷⁷ Blythe, 50, 14.

Spiritual Practices and Healing

Spiritual practices can have a role in how a person heals from trauma, and flow can be part of that recovery process. Here, I review two sources of literature as examples of this. Mary Jo Barrett discusses healing from trauma in terms of a spiritual quest. Linda Mayorga Miller, Terry Lynn Gall and Lise Corbeil observe prayer and the use of sacred objects when presented with significant life stressors.

In “Healing from Trauma: The Quest for Spirituality,” Mary Jo Barrett uncovers specific methods that could be used to heal from trauma. Barrett works mostly with clients who have experienced trauma from physical and/or sexual violations.⁴⁷⁸ “For the first 10 years of my work in the field of violence, I focused on helping them heal from these physical/sexual violations and from their debilitating symptoms, developing specific interventions to interrupt dysfunctional sociopolitical, familial, and intrapsychic patterns.”⁴⁷⁹ Follow-ups were conducted in 1992, and the findings from this survey marked the beginning of a new process for Barrett. Participants were asked what they thought brought about change in their lives, as well as the question of what actually changed about their lives.⁴⁸⁰ Two themes played a particularly large role in their healing: love and knowledge. By love, respondents mean both love of self and love of others, and by knowledge they meant learning new ways of interacting, coping, and functioning.⁴⁸¹

Barrett found that as the behavior of her clients changed, their spirit was changing as well.⁴⁸² “[T]his change of spirit came from the meaning and value they experienced in

⁴⁷⁸ Mary Jo Barrett, “Healing From Trauma: The Quest for Spirituality,” in *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy* (New York, London: The Guilford Press, 1999), 193.

⁴⁷⁹ Barrett, “Healing,” 193.

⁴⁸⁰ Barrett, “Healing,” 193.

⁴⁸¹ Barrett, “Healing,” 193-194.

⁴⁸² Barrett, “Healing,” 195.

relationship to the treatment teams. The healing from trauma is a quest for spirituality. This quest reflects a deep need for meaning and value.”⁴⁸³ Relationship with the Sacred is healing and profound.

Barrett had found herself in a crisis of her own, specifically a crisis of profession, in which she was weighed down by the thought that people were inherently evil—the result of hearing so many of her clients’ accounts of being abused or violated. Barrett’s view of what she was experiencing was that it was a crisis whose roots were spiritual.⁴⁸⁴ She recounts, “As a clinician I could view this as depression, but I knew in my soul that it was a crisis of spirit.”⁴⁸⁵ Barrett knew herself well enough to know that her depression had an even deeper root of her core—her spirit

While conducting interviews, Barrett came to the realization that even in the middle of her own crisis, the fact was she had also witnessed renewal in the stories of her clients.⁴⁸⁶ “It was serendipitous: the path of renewal for my clients would also become the path of renewal for myself.”⁴⁸⁷ The change that Barrett found had helped her clients occurred in three stages. The first stage consisted of creating a context for change, which she found had to include elements of prayer practiced regularly and a recognition of the role that spirituality plays in healing and recovery from trauma.⁴⁸⁸

Within this first stage of creating a context for change are three main goals. The first goal is to give the client a sense of safety in the treatment that they receive, safety with the team, and

⁴⁸³ Barrett, “Healing,” 195.

⁴⁸⁴ Barrett, “Healing,” 196-197.

⁴⁸⁵ Barrett, “Healing,” 197.

⁴⁸⁶ Barrett, “Healing,” 197.

⁴⁸⁷ Barrett, “Healing,” 197.

⁴⁸⁸ Barrett, “Healing,” 200.

to make changes that create safety in their own lives. The second goal is to create an atmosphere where the clients can start talking about their life experiences with family, one person, and within a group. The third goal is for the client to accept that there needs to be a change in their life and a commitment to participate in the program.⁴⁸⁹

Stage two consists of challenging existing troublesome patterns and expanding one's current realities. In stage two, clients begin to learn about specific patterns in their lives that keep them from building a sense of harmony. The clients also begin to put into practice new ways that they can expand their realities.⁴⁹⁰ "We have discovered that the absence of spiritual connection is a variable that allows people to abuse themselves and others. During stage 2 we introduce active alternatives for bringing spiritual connection into clients' lives."⁴⁹¹ A spiritual connection can help clients create peace in their lives.

Stage three is consolidation. The changes in clients, developing relapse prevention strategies, incorporating a ritual into a ceremony to celebrate the hard work and transformation that clients have done are all consolidated. Relationships that were developed in the program and beyond the program are also celebrated.⁴⁹² Notes Barrett, "There is a form of consolidation each and every time you practice. One can end a spiritual experience with a ritual whether that is a mindful awareness of feeling good or noticing beauty or summarizing in our mind what opportunities are available to continue spiritual practices."⁴⁹³ Consolidation brings closure to the program.

⁴⁸⁹ Barrett, "Healing," 201.

⁴⁹⁰ Barrett, "Healing," 202.

⁴⁹¹ Barrett, "Healing," 202.

⁴⁹² Barrett, "Healing," 205.

⁴⁹³ Barrett, "Healing," 205-206.

Linda Mayorga Miller, et al. document “The Experience of Prayer with a Sacred Object within the Context of Significant Life Stress.” Those who participated in the study had spiritual lives that were greatly affected by their prayer practices with a sacred object. Much of the time the sacred objects were introduced in childhood and were carried on into adulthood.⁴⁹⁴ This sacred object’s “early associations with family and community, faith, and religious practices, as well as the strength of maternal attachment, provides the child (and later the adult) with an enduring sense of security and comfort; in essence, a bond that can be drawn on under times of duress.”⁴⁹⁵ The introduction of the sacred object can also take place at adulthood. There were two participants who were the recipients of sacred objects in adulthood. They received the sacred objects at trying times in their lives. The objects received represented a gift given to them out of love and kindness by someone who cared about them deeply.⁴⁹⁶

These findings are consistent with the LaMothe’s (1998) proposal that sacred objects fulfill a complex role in spiritual life by providing both individual and community identity, continuity, and cohesion, as well as providing security and comfort in times of distress. The sacred object serves as a lifelong source of support, strength, and satisfaction.⁴⁹⁷

Sacred objects can help ground us when we are feeling helpless.

Even though there is little research on the effect of religious and spiritual experiences, Pargament and Mahoney (2005) suggest that spiritual experiences might be brought about by objects that are sacred. In this study, participants had expressed how they prayed with their

⁴⁹⁴ Linda Mayorga Miller, Terry Lynn Gall, and Lise Corbeil, “The Experience of Prayer With a Sacred Object Within the Context of Significant Life Stress,” *Journal of Spirituality and Mental Health* 13 (2011): 264.

⁴⁹⁵ Miller, Gall, and Corbeil, “Experience,” 264.

⁴⁹⁶ Miller, Gall, and Corbeil, “Experience,” 264.

⁴⁹⁷ Miller, Gall, and Corbeil, “Experience,” 264.

sacred object, and how they were affected by it at the moment of prayer.⁴⁹⁸ “Participants reported a new sense of calmness, comfort, and peace and a feeling of strength or courage; emotional changes that helped them contain the effects of negative emotions (e.g., fear) and thus steady them to face the challenges ahead.”⁴⁹⁹ The sacred object carries meaning and can help restore a person’s spirit. Participants also reported that even to touch or carry the sacred object was sufficient for them to maintain a sense of rootedness in the midst of adversity.⁵⁰⁰

Most strikingly, some participants reported experiencing a mystical numinous encounter of “oneness” with the divine associated with a profound affective component of overwhelming love, awe and gratitude. ...Although short-term in nature, such positive affective experiences uplifted participants and helped sustain them over the long term.⁵⁰¹

The object can bring about a true moment with the Sacred.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I first provided a fuller understanding and literature review of what is meant by spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual practices. Then I explored what is meant by spiritual practices as one type of flow in recovery from trauma. This chapter helps us understand the role and importance of spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual practices in our lives.

⁴⁹⁸ Miller, Gall, and Corbeil, “Experience,” 266.

⁴⁹⁹ Miller, Gall, and Corbeil, “Experience,” 266.

⁵⁰⁰ Miller, Gall, and Corbeil, “Experience,” 266.

⁵⁰¹ Miller, Gall, and Corbeil, “Experience,” 266.

Chapter Four

Mysticism as a Source of Healing in the Figures of St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill

One of the major struggles for a writer is learning to articulate well on paper. This is also the case for the mystic. The mystic's challenge is how she or he will articulate what in most cases can best be understood through the event in and of itself. The quest for appropriate words to describe an experience of God continues to be the source not only of frustration and satisfaction, but also of praise and faith. For mystics have used words to us that help us understand what they were feeling at the time of the mystical event and after it. Many have chosen words such as peace, courage, love, union, and tranquility. Might it be true to say that these mystical events encourage or promote healing in some way?

In this chapter I claim that the effect of mystical experience(s) is healing in some way. In doing so, I will define the nature of mystical experience through the works of Evelyn Underhill, Bernard McGinn, and Rudolf Otto. I will also include historical examples of people who have experienced what I describe as mystical experience(s) and who have been helped in the midst of their suffering by having that experience. I will present case studies of St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill to document how spiritual practices and flow helped these mystics in their healing and recovery from trauma.

The Nature of Mystical Experience

In her book, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, Evelyn Underhill defines mysticism as "the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; whatever be the

theological formula under which that order is understood.”⁵⁰² She suggests that mystical experiences have one central fact in common, namely “an overwhelming consciousness of God and of his [or her] own soul: a consciousness which absorbs or eclipses all other centres of interest.”⁵⁰³ So the mystical experience is dualistic in the sense that there are two identities aware of each other at the same time, and therefore a form of communication or consciousness occurring at the same time.

Underhill suggests a personal component of the mystical experience in the way

that it is communion with a living Reality, an object of love, capable of response, which demands and receives from him [or her] a total self-donation. This sense of a double movement, a self-giving on the divine side answering to the self-giving on the human side, is found in all great mysticism.⁵⁰⁴

The dualistic nature of the mystical experience involves the whole person and the whole deity. It involves love, response, and the totality of one’s self. The mystical union involves mutual love and wonder in the sense that it includes all aspects of the human and, at the same time, all aspects of the divine.

Another essential of mysticism, says Underhill, is relationship, a relationship with the Sacred that involves emotion:

What is essential is the way the mystic feels about [her or] his Deity, and about [her or] his own relation with it, for this adoring and all-possessing consciousness of the rich and complete divine life over against the self’s life, and of the possible achievement of a level of being, a sublimation of the self, wherein we are perfectly united with it, may fairly be written down as a necessary element of all mystical life.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰² Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company Inc., 1930), xiv.

⁵⁰³ Evelyn Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1960), 2-3.

⁵⁰⁴ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 3-4.

⁵⁰⁵ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 4-5.

The experience of the Sacred affirms love for and with the Sacred. Essential to mysticism are also the actions and temperament of the mystic, which includes what happens to the mystic psychologically.⁵⁰⁶ All of the above are characterized by what she calls ‘the mystic way.’ Underhill defines the mystic way, “as a process of sublimation, which carries the correspondences of the self with the Universe up to higher levels than those on which our normal consciousness works.”⁵⁰⁷ She explains that our normal consciousness separates and organizes parts of the vast amount of our experiences. But the organization that we have developed in our psyches is deficient of a deeper significance and adherence because our every-day consciousness is not able to grasp the reality that lies just beneath the surface where all of our experiences dwell.⁵⁰⁸ Underhill suggests that mystical consciousness offers a more truthful perspective in the understanding “of the divine unifying principle behind appearance.”⁵⁰⁹ So mystical consciousness allows us to gain a perspective on the world that brings us closer to its deepest reality. What we see around us with our eyes and the sum of all of our experiences suggests that all these are brought together by that one “unifying principle” that oversees all of these experiences. Underhill claims that, “To know this at first hand – not to guess, believe, or accept, but to be certain – is the highest achievement of human consciousness, and the ultimate object of mysticism.”⁵¹⁰ The mystical experience is one that encompasses all that is.

For Underhill, the mystic and the corporate life both have a place in the church, as they are also “missionaries, preachers, prophets, social reformers, poets, founders of institutions,

⁵⁰⁶ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 6.

⁵⁰⁷ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 6.

⁵⁰⁸ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 6-7.

⁵⁰⁹ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 7.

⁵¹⁰ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 7.

servants of the poor and the sick, patient guides and instructors of souls.”⁵¹¹ But Underhill suggests that the mystics have a higher source from which they get their vitality, a vitality that other people do not have. This vitality cannot be contained, but is disseminated to others.⁵¹² The mystic “infects with it all with whom he [or she] comes in contact, kindles the latent fire in them: for the spiritual consciousness is caught, not taught.”⁵¹³ At times, just a dialog with such an individual can change a person’s life toward God.⁵¹⁴

Underhill suggests that there are two views of the doctrine of atonement that are connected to mystics. First, there is the act of atonement of Christ in reconciliation and suffering, of the divinity of Christ lowering himself in humiliation, so that Christ could do in human time and space what humans could not do for their own selves.⁵¹⁵ Yet “[o]n the other hand, they see that demand of personal and individual growth, purification, life-enhancement, progressive union with God—helped doubtless by grace, but no less dependent on will—as the condition of attaining Eternal Life, which seems to be made by mystical theology.”⁵¹⁶ Christ died for us and our sins, but also gives us the grace to move forward beyond our sins.

What do mystics have to do with atonement?

Such personalities...do atone for the disabilities of other men [and women]. Therefore the social value of the mystics, their place in the organism, is intimately connected with the atoning idea. Were it not for the principle which the doctrine of Atonement expresses, the mystics would be spiritual individualists, whose life and experience would be meaningless except for themselves.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹¹ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 39.

⁵¹² Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 39 – 40.

⁵¹³ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 40.

⁵¹⁴ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 40.

⁵¹⁵ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 44.

⁵¹⁶ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 44.

⁵¹⁷ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 62.

Atonement is part of the identity of the mystic in the sense that she or he is constantly praying for and actively saving souls. The mystic atones for the iniquities of souls and actively prays to God for their souls.

Underhill suggests that mystics seem to have divided their experience into three states. At times they look at the states objectively and suggest,⁵¹⁸ “three worlds or three aspects of God of which they become successively aware.”⁵¹⁹ At times they perceive them to be subjective and suggest⁵²⁰ “three stages of growth through which they pass, such as those of Beginner, Proficient, and Perfect; or phases of spiritual progress in which we first meditate upon reality, then contemplate reality, and at last are united with reality.”⁵²¹ The states are stages or degrees for which the mystic will undergo.

We find another example of the three levels of spiritual consciousness in the person of Richard of St. Victor. “The first is called dilation of mind, enlarging and deepening our vision of the world. The next is elevation of mind, in which we behold the realities which are above ourselves. The third is ecstasy, in which the mind is carried up to contact with truth in its pure simplicity.”⁵²² Underhill suggests that this structure is based on Plotinian universals interpreted by the use of subjective terminology.⁵²³

Underhill continues by proposing that women and men who usually abide by the natural world that is transformative might intuitively move to the first phase of the three, where the central point of their soul already lives, and in a moment of ecstasy might move upward toward

⁵¹⁸ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 7.

⁵¹⁹ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 7.

⁵²⁰ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 7.

⁵²¹ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 7 – 8.

⁵²² Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 10.

⁵²³ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 10.

communing with the Source of all life.⁵²⁴ “There you have the mystic’s vision of the Universe, and the mystic’s way of purification, enlightenment and ecstasy, bringing new and deeper knowledge of reality as the self’s interest, urged by its loving desire of the Ultimate, is shifted from sense to soul, from soul to spirit.”⁵²⁵ The mystic constantly moves toward deeper consciousness of and with the Sacred.

Bernard McGinn defines Christian mysticism, “as that part, or element, of Christian belief and practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of what the mystics themselves have described as a direct and transformative presence of God.”⁵²⁶ McGinn suggests that even though the word *mysticism* is somewhat recent—for though it was developed in the seventeenth century it was not frequently used until the nineteenth century—the adjective *mystical*, which means “hidden” in Greek, has been used among Christians since the late second century CE.⁵²⁷ “Christians used *mystical* to refer to the secret realities of their beliefs, rituals, and practices, especially to the ‘mystical meaning’ of the Bible, that is, the inner message about attaining God that may be found beneath the literal sense of the scriptural texts and stories.”⁵²⁸ McGinn continues by suggesting that there was also talk of “mystical contemplation,” and from approximately 500 CE on, of “mystical theology,” which he defines as “the knowledge of God gained not by human rational effort but by the soul’s direct reception of a divine gift.”⁵²⁹ Mystical theology uses the heart, not the mind as its own source of truth.

⁵²⁴ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 8 – 9.

⁵²⁵ Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism*, 9.

⁵²⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* [New York: Random House, 2006], xiv.

⁵²⁷ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xiv.

⁵²⁸ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xiv.

⁵²⁹ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xiv.

McGinn proposes that this conception of mysticism has seven implications: first, that mysticism was (up to approximately a century and a half ago) consistently an aspect of “concrete historical religions,” such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Mysticism was not a religion in and of itself, neither was it seen as a common characteristic of every religion. It is for this reason that a better understanding of mysticism can be attained by its association with various components of entire religious systems of which it is only one expression.⁵³⁰

Second, McGinn suggests that “mysticism—or better, the mystical life—is essentially a process, an itinerary or journey to God, not just a moment or brief state of what is often called mystical union, important as such moments may be.”⁵³¹ Mystics used particular methods to prepare themselves for God’s intercession in their lives and for the fruit that God’s movements produced in the mystic and in the persons to whom the mystic relayed the message.⁵³²

Our third element of discussion is about the subject of union and how it is understood to be the primary focus for mystical life.⁵³³

Union with God, or mystical union (*unio mystica*), has certainly been important in the history of mysticism in Christianity and its sister religions, ...but to restrict mysticism to those who have spoken of their own uniting with God leaves out significant historical figures, such as Augustine of Hippo, who have avoided unitive language.⁵³⁴

There have been a multitude of other methods by which mystics have expressed their experiences with God.⁵³⁵ Those other methods include, “contemplation, vision, ecstasy,

⁵³⁰ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xiv.

⁵³¹ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xiv.

⁵³² McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xiv - xv.

⁵³³ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xv.

⁵³⁴ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xv.

⁵³⁵ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xv.

deification, birthing, endless desire and pursuit, and the like.”⁵³⁶ It is for this reason that McGinn, fourthly, suggests that the concept of presence suggests inclusivity and support, as opposed to the term union for bringing together the various elements of the experiences that mystics have shown others and the changes that God has made in their thinking and their journeys.⁵³⁷ The mystical experience is so powerful that it can change a life.

God does not reveal God’s self to people in the way that objects in this world are seen. An engagement with God is tantamount to seeing a friend or someone you love. Numerous Christian mystics have utilized intimate words in their work, foremost when describing their relationship with Jesus. Conversely, God is not a human person. To refer to God as person would mean to limit God to the world that is created. This limited world cannot define or contain God.⁵³⁸ McGinn continues, “This is why speaking of God’s presence is at bottom another strategy for saying the unsayable—and why many mystics have wrestled with the paradox that God is found in absence and negation more than in presence, at least as we usually conceive and experience it.”⁵³⁹ Our human references to God may seem silly at times. This is so because God is really outside the scope of our human psyches.

McGinn’s fifth idea is the preference of the term “consciousness” over the term ‘experience’ when used to describe mysticism, as many authors are currently utilizing the term mystical experience. Indeed the mystics did tend to use the term ‘experience,’ and of course, not quite in the sense that other things are experienced. But the philosophical term ‘experience’ will show us that its meaning is quite complex. Moreover, the word experience might allude to the

⁵³⁶ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xv.

⁵³⁷ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xv.

⁵³⁸ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xv.

⁵³⁹ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xv.

meaning of mysticism that can mean a specific feeling or idea that can easily be distinguishable from keener mental abilities,⁵⁴⁰ which encompass the vast array of life lived consciously, meaning that humans find definition in terms of how they are able to “know and love.”⁵⁴¹ To integrate information inside and out of us as humans, to try to comprehend and judge what reality is, and to live and to love based on these decisions, are essentially all conscious acts.⁵⁴²

Hence, the word *consciousness* as employed here is meant to stress that mysticism (as the mystics have insisted) is more than a matter of unusual sensations, but essentially comprises new ways of knowing and loving based on states of awareness in which God becomes present in our inner acts, not as an object to be grasped, but as the direct and transforming center of life.⁵⁴³

When speaking about the Sacred’s reality, we cannot do so without including some sense of growth.

The sixth point of mysticism is the question of whether a mystic has direct and immediate engagement with God. McGinn’s answer is both yes and no. Yes, in the sense that when mystics describe the event, it “takes place at the deepest and most fundamental layer of the self and in a way that is more profound than that found through the usual religious activities.”⁵⁴⁴ Many mystics, particularly those that stand by the idea that the soul and God turn into one entity, have insisted that at that point there is no mediation between the two. Conversely, in preparing for and in expressing the encounter, mediation is a necessity at all times. Also, because there are mystics who, when speaking of their oneness with God, who have also claimed that there is another point where the Creator and created can still be distinguished,⁵⁴⁵ it is possible to state “that mystical

⁵⁴⁰ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xv – xvi.

⁵⁴¹ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xvi.

⁵⁴² McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xvi.

⁵⁴³ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xvi.

⁵⁴⁴ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xvi.

⁵⁴⁵ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xvi – xvii.

consciousness involves a complex form of mediated immediacy.”⁵⁴⁶ So it might seem as though there is both a separateness and oneness happening at the same time within the mystic.

Finally, one common characteristic of all the mystics is that their engagement with God has changed the way they think and has changed the direction of their lives. God assists in the conversion of the mystics and not only suggests but gives them the impetus to embolden others by instruction in order for there to be conversion in their lives. It is for this reason that judging whether or not a saint or mystic is credible depends on whether or not they teach of conversion in their own lives and conversion of the people who have been affected by them. McGinn mentions that his reason for writing his anthology of Christian mystical texts is to continue the distribution of the invitation to conversion and transformation.⁵⁴⁷

Rudolf Otto’s articulation of mystical experience comes to us in the form of the word and meaning of what he calls *mysterium tremendum*:

The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its ‘profane’, non-religious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of—whom or what? In the presence of that which is a mystery inexpressible and above all creatures.⁵⁴⁸

First, the element of awe is another expansion of the meaning of *mysterium tremendum*. Otto contends that a tremor is what happens to a person out of a feeling of fear. But he uses it to

⁵⁴⁶ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xvii.

⁵⁴⁷ McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xvii.

⁵⁴⁸ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 12 - 13.

mean something else. In this instance, it suggests a certain kind of reaction from emotions. It is separate from the feeling of fear, but fear also sheds some light on what it means.⁵⁴⁹

Second, the element of overpoweringness, also known as majestas, as well as the words might and power, can help us understand what he means when he uses the term *mysterium tremendum*. The *tremendum* portion of the term can be better employed as *tremendum majestas*, meaning awe-ful majesty.⁵⁵⁰ Otto continues by saying that, “It is especially in relation to this creature-consciousness, of which we have already spoken, [that] comes upon the scene, as a sort of shadow or subjective reflection of it.”⁵⁵¹ These feelings also create a sense of what Otto calls religious humility.⁵⁵²

A third and final element of the *mysterium tremendum* is energy or urgency. “It is particularly vividly perceptible in the term ... wrath; and it everywhere clothes itself in symbolical expressions—vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, impetus.”⁵⁵³ These terms help us understand what the mystics talk about in their reflections on that reality of God in all existence:

In mysticism, too, this element of ‘energy’ is a very living and vigorous factor, at any rate in the ‘voluntaristic’ mysticism, the mysticism of love, where it is very forcibly seen in that ‘consuming fire’ of love, whose burning strength the mystic can hardly bear, but begs that the heat that has scorched [her or] him may be mitigated, lest [she or] he be [herself or] himself destroyed by it. And in this urgency and pressure the mystic’s ‘love’ claims a perceptible kinship with the ... scorching and consuming wrath of God; it is the same ‘energy’, only differently directed. ‘Love’, says one of the mystics, ‘is nothing else than quenched wrath.’⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 13.

⁵⁵⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 19 – 20.

⁵⁵¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 20.

⁵⁵² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 20.

⁵⁵³ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 23.

⁵⁵⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 24.

The mystical experience is so intense that one could both yearn and fear it at the same time.

For the purposes of this chapter, mysticism is defined as the event for which there exists a recognizable and palpable change in consciousness with the Sacred that can yield both positive and terrifying results. Merriam-Webster's Dictionary definition for the word, 'exist' is: "(verb) 1: To have being 2: To continue to be: Live. The closely related definition for the word, 'existence' is: (noun) 1: Continuance in living 2: Actual occurrence 3: Something existing." In short, mysticism deals with the real, and with the knowledge that the Sacred is real.

I use the terms, 'recognizable,' and 'palpable' to convey a definite sense of transformation that is actually felt or touched in some way in a mystical experience. In mysticism, that tangibility (of the Sacred) is what humans crave. The mystic's glimpse of the Sacred can leave the mystic in a state of isolation because of the sense of profound intimacy with the Sacred that they experience.

I use the term, 'change in consciousness' to direct the reader back toward the individual. In this change in consciousness, the perceptions of everyday thinking and feeling are put aside. The individual is transported in their minds and hearts toward the Sacred that is of the universe and all that is in it, including the mystic herself. While the person does experience a change in consciousness, she also experiences being separated from the Sacred by the self's utter creatureliness. Yet at the same time she is aware that she is part of something much larger than she could ever imagine.

The term, 'with,' means accompaniment. The mystical event is one that involves the human and the Other. It happens as a result of combining both of them. It is an event of communication and where there is communication, there are always two or more entities. Here, the human is communing with the Sacred.

The term, 'Sacred,' denotes all the different ways that humans describe the Holy. Sacred can mean Yahweh, God, or Allah, God or Goddess. The term 'Sacred' also includes all other faiths.

The phrase, 'that can yield,' suggests that there is some form of a result in the event. Typically, the individual is changed by the event. The event transforms a life; it leads the person toward the Sacred. Faith and belief in the Sacred are increased because the event raised to awareness that which is with us all of the time. The event magnifies this reality for a moment in time. Mystics characteristically mention the way such an event has transformed their lives.

Finally, the words, 'both positive and terrifying results,' because the event can produce positive feelings such as joy, elation, love, peace, serenity, tranquility, and profound energy. Yet the event can also produce negative feelings such as dread, fear, panic, and distress. These negative feelings are all part of the event. The vastness of the Sacred can be so very overwhelming that the human mind and heart must react this way.

The intimacy of such mystical events is so very intense. In this finite world that we see around us, we deduce that there are others around us that are physically separated from us. They do not know our thoughts, our struggles, our joys or sorrows. They may be separated from us because of our creatureliness, but in a mystical event we are not separated from that with which we commune.

St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill

What follows are accounts of St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill, four historic examples of people who have had mystical experiences and have been helped to endure their suffering by those experiences. Their mystical

relationship with the Divine helped them endure their suffering and distress and reminded them that there was a God who loved and knew them well. In these sections I will first describe each person's life and then I discuss the suffering and mystical healing they experienced.

The Life of St. Therese of Lisieux

Therese of Lisieux was born on January 2, 1873 in Alencon, France. Her baptismal name was Marie-Francoise-Therese Martin.⁵⁵⁵ Her mother's name was Zelig Guerin. Zelig was a successful lacemaker while her husband, Therese's father, Louis Martin, made watches. Zelig and Louis were both devoted souls in the Catholic Church. They both considered religious life, but were turned away, Louis for not knowing Latin, and Zelig discouraged from pursuing that vocation by the superior from the sisters of the Hotel-Dieu in Alencon. At that point Zelig turned to lacemaking and was so successful at it that she turned the skill into a business.⁵⁵⁶

Louis and Zelig met one another in the year 1858 and married that July. Louis suggested that they live without sin, as siblings, but were discouraged from doing so. It is at this point that they decided to have children. Zelig gave birth to nine children, four of whom died (three while in their infancy, and one, whose name was Helene, at five and a half years of age).⁵⁵⁷

A short time after she was born, Therese began struggling to survive. She was suffering with an intestinal illness. Therese was taken in by a wet nurse and later, at 15 months, she

⁵⁵⁵ Guy Gaucher, *The Story of a Life: St. Therese of Lisieux*, trans. Anne Marie Brennan (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 7. The author only provides a general bibliography for primary sources at the end of the book and does not provide footnotes or endnotes in the text.

⁵⁵⁶ Gaucher, *Story*, 7-10.

⁵⁵⁷ Gaucher, *Story*, 10-11.

returned to her family.⁵⁵⁸ Yet on August 28, 1877, at the age of four and a half, she lost her mother, age 45, to breast cancer. Traumatized, she felt her life had come to an end.⁵⁵⁹

Five years after her mother's death in October 1882, when Therese was nine years of age, her sister Pauline began the process of entering a Carmelite monastery at Lisieux. This sister was like a mother to Therese. Therese knew that this was going to be the last time she would ever see her sister before she was cloistered.⁵⁶⁰

Therese's father would suffer two episodes of paralysis before his death on July 29, 1894.⁵⁶¹

Therese began her journey as a postulant at the Carmel of Lisieux. The time of her postulancy was marked from April 9, 1888 to January 10, 1889. The time she spent as a novitiate spanned from January 10, 1889 to September 24, 1890. On September 8, 1890, Therese makes a profession of faith and is given her Veil. At approximately 7:20 p.m. on Thursday, September 30, 1897, Therese of Lisieux passes on⁵⁶² from this life to the next of tuberculosis.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁸ Dorothy Day, *Therese* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1960), 35-37.

⁵⁵⁹ Gaucher, *Story*, 23-26.

⁵⁶⁰ Etienne Robo, *Two Portraits of St. Therese of Lisieux* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), 53-54.

⁵⁶¹ John Clarke, trans., *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1996), 281-283.

⁵⁶² Clarke, *Story*, 282-285.

⁵⁶³ Gaucher, *Story*, 201.

St. Therese of Lisieux's Suffering and Mystical Healing

The beginnings of Therese's sufferings were brought on by the death of her mother, Zélie Martin, who died of breast cancer⁵⁶⁴ at the age of 45 on August 28, 1877. At the time, Therese was only four and a half years of age. Understandably, Therese took the death of her mother very hard. Therese committed to memory every single thing that had happened during her mother's illness, but particularly those last weeks of her life. An event that is etched in her memory is of her mother receiving the last sacraments as she was dying.⁵⁶⁵ Therese later recalls,

*After Mamma's death my happy disposition changed completely. I, who had been so full of life, so outgoing, became shy, quiet and oversensitive. A look was enough to reduce me to tears. I was only happy when no one paid any attention to me. I could not bear the company of strangers, and only regained my cheerfulness within the intimacy of my family.*⁵⁶⁶

The change in Therese's personality was like that of night and day. She was only comfortable with family.

With her second oldest sister Pauline's entrance into the monastery in 1882, Therese, at nine, felt she had lost one who was like a mother to her. It was very difficult for her to understand. Therese's visits to her sister, Pauline would prove to be gut-wrenching for her.⁵⁶⁷ "I said in the depths of my heart: Pauline is lost to me!"⁵⁶⁸ The trauma of losing her sister to the monastery reminded her of the trauma of her mother's death.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁴ Gaucher, *Story*, 23.

⁵⁶⁵ Gaucher, *Story*, 26.

⁵⁶⁶ Gaucher, *Story*, 33.

⁵⁶⁷ Gaucher, *Story*, 43.

⁵⁶⁸ Gaucher, *Story*, 43.

⁵⁶⁹ Gaucher, *Story*, 43.

From this point on, Therese only had short visits with her sister once a week, separated by a grill. She spent much of those visits with Pauline in tears.⁵⁷⁰ Therese's illness began during these harsh times. Her uncle tried to make her feel better by going on walks with her and talking about her mother, Zélie. But Therese always felt slightly afraid of him and would begin to cry as her uncle continued to try to cheer her up. It was one night after such a walk that Therese began to have tremors.⁵⁷¹ "Believing I was cold, Aunt covered me with blankets and surrounded me with hot water bottles. But nothing was able to stop my shaking, which lasted all night."⁵⁷² Theresa's suffering seemed as if it would never stop.

Those chills turned into delusions, convulsions, and incapacitation.⁵⁷³ Therese had a cousin, Jeanne who recalled Therese having "propulsive seizures during which she made wheel-like movements that she would have been absolutely incapable of making in a state of health."⁵⁷⁴ Jeanne also recalled that Therese threw herself on the floor with great force.⁵⁷⁵ Therese

⁵⁷⁰ Patricia O'Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 18-19.

⁵⁷¹ O'Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 19.

⁵⁷² John Clarke, trans., *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux*, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976): 60-61, quoted in Patricia O'Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 19.

⁵⁷³ O'Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 19.

⁵⁷⁴ John Clarke, trans., *Saint Therese of Lisieux General Correspondence I* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1982): 162, quoted in Patricia O'Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 19.

⁵⁷⁵ O'Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 19.

remembered, “I often appeared to be in a faint not making the slightest movement...yet I heard everything that was said around me.”⁵⁷⁶ Therese was in a trance-like state.

Therese’s sister Marie recalled that she suspected that it was the devil’s work that had taken hold of Therese.

It tried to kill our little sister. Her bed was in a big alcove, and there was a space between wall and bed at both ends; she used to try and throw herself into this space. Several times she succeeded, and I wonder how she did not split her head on the paving-stones...other times she would bang her head against the wood of the bedstead. And there were times when she tried to speak to me, but no sound could be heard.⁵⁷⁷

Therese could not control the way her body was flung at the wall by a force that seemed to be other than her own.

The doctor who had diagnosed Zelig with inoperable cancer, Dr. Notta, was called in to see Therese. He was baffled by what he saw. He suggested that it was a form of ‘hysteria,’ a diagnosis often given to women in those days. Dr. Notta had never witnessed it happen to a child. Jeanne said that the doctor, “gave the impression that there was more to it than just that. Just what, he did not know himself.”⁵⁷⁸ Marie mentioned that the doctor told her father that

⁵⁷⁶ John Clarke, trans., *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux*, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976): 62, quoted in Patricia O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 19.

⁵⁷⁷ Christopher O’Mahoney, ed. and trans. *Saint Therese of Lisieux by Those Who Knew Her* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1975): 87, quoted in Patricia O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 20.

⁵⁷⁸ Christopher O’Mahoney, ed. and trans. *Saint Therese of Lisieux by Those Who Knew Her* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1975): 268, also found in John Clarke, trans., *Saint Therese of Lisieux General Correspondence I* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1982): 162; quoted in Patricia O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 20.

science had no power in this circumstance and that he could not do anything to help Therese. Louis Martin felt utterly helpless.⁵⁷⁹

Therese's illness lasted approximately six weeks.⁵⁸⁰ In the middle of May, Therese's sister, Leonie was taking her turn to watch over Therese and Marie had gone out to the garden.⁵⁸¹ Leonie was reading as she sat by the window, ignoring Therese as she called out for Marie, "Mama, Mama." But Therese began calling so loudly that Marie came running into the room in fright. She saw Therese in such a struggle that Marie was sure it would be the death of her younger sister. Therese gave no sign of recognizing Marie.⁵⁸²

I was quite conscious of her entering the room, but I couldn't recognize with any certainty who it was, so I went on calling for 'Mama' louder than ever. It was very painful to me, to have this unnatural conflict going on in my mind, and it must have been still more painful for Marie. When she found she couldn't convince me that she was really there, she knelt down beside my bed, with Leonie and Celine, turned towards Our Lady's statue and prayed for me like a mother praying for her child's life.⁵⁸³

Therese was not conscious of the people that were around her.

Therese also turned to the statue and began to pray. She requested pity from 'her Mother in Heaven.' All of a sudden, she received a vision of the Virgin Mary smiling at her with an infinite amount of kindness.⁵⁸⁴ "She [Marie] watched Therese "fix her gaze on the statue," grow

⁵⁷⁹ O'Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 20.

⁵⁸⁰ O'Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 20.

⁵⁸¹ Monica Furlong, *Therese of Lisieux* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987, 2001), 50.

⁵⁸² O'Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 21-22.

⁵⁸³ Saint Therese de l'Enfant-Jesus et de la Sainte Face, *Histoire d'une Ame* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1985): 78-79, quoted in Monica Furlong, *Therese of Lisieux* (New York: Orbis Books 2001), 50.

⁵⁸⁴ Furlong, *Therese of Lisieux*, 50.

calm, and begin to cry quietly. The symptoms vanished.”⁵⁸⁵ Therese later mentioned, “The Blessed Virgin had appeared *very beautiful*, and I had seen her *smile at me*.”⁵⁸⁶

A while after this healing experience, Therese went on a retreat for several days at the abbey at Carmel. While on retreat Therese was influenced by Abbe Domin. His own influence was Jansensim, an aspect of French Catholicism of the day. He told the retreatants that they were going to die and that one child might even pass on by the close of the retreat experience. This was the opposite of the foundation Therese had been taught by Pauline, which was love, sacrifice, and the symbolism found in flowers.⁵⁸⁷ Therese recalls, “What the abbe told us was frightening. He spoke about mortal sin, and he described a soul in the state of sin and how much God hated it. He compared it to a little dove soaked in mud, and who is no longer able to fly.”⁵⁸⁸ He taught it was imperative to confess their mortal sins before going to Communion.⁵⁸⁹ Therese became terrified about the condition of her soul.⁵⁹⁰ “For me to express what I suffered *for a year*

⁵⁸⁵ John Clarke, trans., *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux*, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976): 65, also found in Christopher O’Mahoney, ed. and trans. *Saint Therese of Lisieux by Those Who Knew Her* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1975): 87; quoted in Patricia O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 22.

⁵⁸⁶ John Clarke, trans., *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux*, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976): 67, quoted in Patricia O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 22.

⁵⁸⁷ O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 24.

⁵⁸⁸ Jean-Francois Six, *La Veritable Enfance de Therese de Lisieux, Nervrose et Saintete* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971): 201, quoted in Patricia O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 24.

⁵⁸⁹ O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 24.

⁵⁹⁰ O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 24.

and a half would be impossible. All my most simple thoughts and actions became the cause of trouble for me.”⁵⁹¹ Therese became frightened that she would end up in isolation from God.

It was Therese’s habit to spend time with Marie after school to have her hair curled. It was then that Therese would cry to Marie about all of the deadly sins that she had committed. Marie gave a name to all that Therese was experiencing as she had experienced it personally. The name was scruples. Scruples are fears, and not sins, a distortion that regards normal thoughts and actions as evil. Marie had gone on a retreat experience with a Father Pichon three years before this talk with Therese.⁵⁹² In a letter to her, a year after the retreat, he had advised her to, “forget the malcontent God and see the indulgent God, full of love.”⁵⁹³ With that in mind, Marie told Therese what to include and what to exclude in her confession, and Therese did just that. Therese relied more on Marie and in the autumn of that year, Celine and Marie were no longer at the abbey, so Therese had to return by herself. Therese continued to suffer from scruples and loneliness. The abbe again spoke about sin, judgment, and hell. It was during her second term at the abbey that Therese became so sick she had to leave.⁵⁹⁴

Therese was vehemently against mysticism of any form⁵⁹⁵ even though she had had the experience of seeing Mary, the Mother of God. But that was an experience she wished never to

⁵⁹¹ John Clarke, trans., *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux*, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976): 84, quoted in Patricia O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 24.

⁵⁹² O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 25.

⁵⁹³ Jean-Francois Six, *La Veritable Enfance de Therese de Lisieux, Nervrose et Saintete* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971): 210, quoted in Patricia O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux: A Biography* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1983), 25.

⁵⁹⁴ O’Connor, *Therese of Lisieux*, 25 – 26.

⁵⁹⁵ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Therese of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 252–253.

repeat.⁵⁹⁶ In her writings, Therese consequently puts more emphasis on being united with God rather than seeing God, and on obeying God rather than being happy.⁵⁹⁷ For Therese, it did not matter whether she was on Earth, or in heaven. She was connected to God in the present moment.⁵⁹⁸

Even though she rejected mysticism, in Therese's writing we find a trace of intimacy with Jesus that gives us a hint of a mystical relationship with Him.⁵⁹⁹

In her closeness to Jesus, she speaks of him both as friend and lover, which argues something akin to what Nathan Soderblum has called a "personality mysticism," meaning an experience of Christ in the midst of life here and now. That notion meant more to her than any transcendent experience, such as St. Paul's rapture into the third heaven.⁶⁰⁰

Yet I suggest that St. Therese was in all reality a mystic even though she rejected the mystical. To feel Christ in all aspects of her everyday life suggests that her relationship with Christ was indeed supernatural, making it a characteristically mystical relationship.

St. Therese would continue to heal through the flow practice of writing. Love, sacrifice, and symbolism found in flowers were very much ingrained in Therese by her sister Pauline at an early age. These can also be seen as spiritual formation practices as well as flow practices that would encourage healing from the trauma that she had experienced. Love is present in Willard's disciplines of engagement as worship, celebration, service, and fellowship. Love is present as well in Foster's outward disciplines of service and as the corporate disciplines of worship and celebration. Sacrifice is seen as one of Willard's disciplines of abstinence and as Foster's

⁵⁹⁶ Von Balthasar, *Therese of Lisieux*, 253.

⁵⁹⁷ Von Balthasar, *Therese of Lisieux*, 253.

⁵⁹⁸ Von Balthasar, *Therese of Lisieux*, 253.

⁵⁹⁹ Thomas R. Nevin, *Therese of Lisieux: God's Gentle Warrior* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006), 314.

⁶⁰⁰ Nevin, *Therese of Lisieux*, 314.

outward discipline of submission. Symbolism found in flowers can be found in Willard's disciplines of engagement as study and Foster's inward disciplines as meditation and study.

The Life of St. John of the Cross

John of the Cross was born in Fontiveros, Spain in 1542.⁶⁰¹ John's father, Gonzalo de Yepes, defied the social customs of marriage, for though his family were upper-class silk merchants, he married a weaver of poor economic status, Catalina Alvarez. He married for love, not status.⁶⁰² Gonzalo de Yepes and Catalina Alvarez became the parents of three children: Francisco, Luis, and John. When John was approximately three years old his father died,⁶⁰³ followed five or six years later by John's middle brother, Luis. When he was nine years old, John, along with his older brother and mother, moved to Medina del Campo in the northwest section of Madrid.⁶⁰⁴

Once in the city, Catalina enrolled John in a school called Colegio de la Doctrine, a school for the poor and orphans.⁶⁰⁵ The school provided John with a roof over his head and regular meals. At this school, John was promised a basic education and job training in a trade that would sustain him. Yet John was not interested in any of the trades offered him, preferring work that was more suited to his personality and gifts of gentleness and patience: as a nurse and

⁶⁰¹ John Welch, *When Gods Die: An Introduction to John of the Cross* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 3.

⁶⁰² Kieran Kavanaugh, "General Introduction," in *John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 8.

⁶⁰³ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction," 8.

⁶⁰⁴ Welch, *When Gods Die*, 3.

⁶⁰⁵ Welch, *When Gods Die*, 3.

alms seeker at Nuestra Senora de la Concepcion (Las Bubas). The position was offered by Don Alonso Alvarez de Toledo.⁶⁰⁶

John began to attend a Jesuit school while he worked as a nurse. There he learned metaphysics, Latin, and Spanish classics, and various other subjects, under the mentorship of Juan Bonifacio, a Jesuit. He also learned writing skills and began to write compositions and poems of his own.⁶⁰⁷

At the age of twenty-one, John decided to enter the novitiate at the Carmelite Convento de Santa Ana in Medina del Campo instead of accepting the offer of Don Alvarez, the hospital administrator, to be the hospital's chaplain after ordination. The year 1563 marked the many changes that were occurring in his life.⁶⁰⁸

From 1563 to 1578, Spanish reform and John's Carmelite vocation took shape. At the completion of John's one year novitiate, John became Fray Juan de Santo Matia. John studied the Carmelite rule and its origins, using the manual entitled *The Book of the First Monks*.⁶⁰⁹

From the years 1564-1568 John attended the University of Salamanca. He spent three years in the arts program and one year studying theology.⁶¹⁰ In 1567 John met Teresa of Avila, who was trying to reform the Carmelites into more of a contemplative order. Happily for her, John was willing to help her with her cause.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁶ Welch, *When Gods Die*, 3.

⁶⁰⁷ Welch, *When Gods Die*, 4.

⁶⁰⁸ Welch, *When Gods Die*, 4.

⁶⁰⁹ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction," 9.

⁶¹⁰ Kieran Kavanaugh, "General Introduction: Biographical Chronology," in *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), 29.

⁶¹¹ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction," 10.

To mark the beginning of the order's contemplative way, Fray Juan changed his name from Juan de Santo Matia to Juan de la Cruz (John of the Cross). Two confreres witnessed this momentous occasion on November 28, 1568.⁶¹² Kavanaugh comments that, "The cross, indeed, lay at the core of his life and teaching, and it became for him a title of glory in the mystery of Jesus Christ."⁶¹³

Just eight years later in 1576, John was arrested for the first time for supporting church reform. Though this time John was released by Nicolas Ormaneto, a Papal Legate, Ormaneto's death prompted John's second arrest on December 2, 1577. He was in prison at a Carmelite monastery in Toledo⁶¹⁴ for nine months⁶¹⁵ before he escaped and made his way to the convent in Toledo where Teresa lived with her religious sisters.⁶¹⁶ They disguised him and took him to a hospital in Santa Cruz.⁶¹⁷

Some years later in September, 1591 John set out for Ubedo to receive medical attention for fevers and for sores from gangrene on his feet.⁶¹⁸ Soon after John's arrival at the hospital, his condition, due to the acute bacterial skin infection erysipelas, worsened. Surgery and medical attention failed to help him.⁶¹⁹ On December 13 John said his good-byes and was given the Last Rites.⁶²⁰ "At midnight on December 14, 1591, shortly after the bell for Matins sounded, Fray

⁶¹² Kavanaugh, "General Introduction," 14.

⁶¹³ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction," 14.

⁶¹⁴ Welch, *When Gods Die*, 10.

⁶¹⁵ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction: Biographical Chronology," 30.

⁶¹⁶ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction," 19.

⁶¹⁷ Welch, *When Gods Die*, 10.

⁶¹⁸ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction: Biographical Chronology," 32.

⁶¹⁹ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction," 24.

⁶²⁰ Kavanaugh, "General Introduction: Biographical Chronology," 32.

John of the Cross died, repeating the words of the psalmist, ‘Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my Spirit.’”⁶²¹

John was beatified on January 22, 1675, by Clement X. On December 27, 1726, Benedict XIII canonized John. Pius XI declared St. John of the Cross a Doctor of the Universal Church on August 24, 1926.⁶²²

St. John of the Cross’ Suffering and Mystical Healing

John’s work, *The Dark Night*, derives from his personal experiences, and is therefore useful to us as a resource to examine his suffering and mystical healing.⁶²³ John wrote *The Dark Night* in the form of a poem. In the first two stanzas of the prologue, he noted that there are two effects of purification, namely the sensory and the spiritual. In the last six stanzas, he wrote of the awesome effects of illumination and union. Hence, in the poem, John’s description is of two essential components of spiritual formation. It is first about the pain of passing through the dark night, and then the joyous event of the engagement with God.⁶²⁴ He wrote, “if this night darkens, it does so only to give light; if it humiliates, it does so only to exalt; if it impoverishes, it does so only to enrich. The point of arrival to which the night leads is the ‘new self,’ divinized in being and operation, living now a life of faith, hope, and love, fortified and pure.”⁶²⁵ John appreciates the struggles in life because if we did not have struggles, we would not have peace.

⁶²¹ Kavanaugh, “General Introduction,” 24.

⁶²² Kavanaugh, “General Introduction: Biographical Chronology,” 33.

⁶²³ Kieran Kavanaugh, “The Dark Night: Introduction to The Dark Night,” in *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), 354 – 355.

⁶²⁴ Kavanaugh, “The Dark Night: Introduction to The Dark Night,” 353.

⁶²⁵ Kavanaugh, “The Dark Night: Introduction to The Dark Night,” 356.

John's composition of the poem occurred after his own passing through the dark night or narrow path that takes us to our life eternal. From the sublime heights of uniting with God, he writes of the joy of escaping himself and other adversaries in disguise with a ladder in the darkness of night.⁶²⁶

The experience of the dark night can best be explained as "a painful lack or privation: darkness in the intellect; aridity in the will regarding the exercise of love; emptiness of all possessions in the memory; and a general affliction and torment as a consequence."⁶²⁷ People who experience this sharply feel the misery that accompanies it and feel as though there is no end in sight. They feel as though they have no power over their faculties, that others' help is of no use, and that there is no hope of a cure. In short, they feel forsaken by God. This sense of abandonment is the most acute aspect of the dark night of the soul, for those who suffer it are also those who most ardently long for God.⁶²⁸

All of these experiences of pain and loss including the good results of change are all qualities that are typical of contemplation.⁶²⁹ "This contemplation is an inpouring of God into the soul, a divine, loving knowledge that is general, without images or concepts, obscure and hidden from the one who receives it, a knowledge that both purifies and illumines."⁶³⁰ Here, John uses the term "contemplation" to refer to a God who is infinite and limitless and therefore cannot be contained. John is referring to the totality of God.⁶³¹

⁶²⁶ Kavanaugh, "The Dark Night: Introduction to The Dark Night," 353 – 354.

⁶²⁷ Kavanaugh, "The Dark Night: Introduction to The Dark Night," 356.

⁶²⁸ Kavanaugh, "The Dark Night: Introduction to The Dark Night," 356.

⁶²⁹ Kavanaugh, "The Dark Night: Introduction to The Dark Night," 356.

⁶³⁰ Kavanaugh, "The Dark Night: Introduction to The Dark Night," 356.

⁶³¹ Kavanaugh, "The Dark Night: Introduction to The Dark Night," 356.

John shows us clearly how deeply he understands the process of the Dark Night, having gone through it himself. He has learned that his suffering has been healed through his mystical experience, and it is because of his mystical healing that he understands that the dark night has its place, a place for purification, where God can both heal you and at the same time strengthen your relationship with God.

3. That the intellect reach union with the divine light and become divine in that state of perfection, this dark contemplation must first purge and annihilate it of its natural light and bring it actually into obscurity. It is fitting that this darkness last as long as is necessary for the expulsion and annihilation of the intellect's habitual way of understanding, which was a long time in use, and that divine light and illumination take its place.⁶³²

John proposes that the light of the divine replaces the darkness within.

John talks about love and union with the Sacred and the necessity for there to be periods of suffering and dryness in our lives. It is only after the suffering and dryness that the soul will be able to attain the love and union with the Sacred that it so desires. This love and union is mystical healing.

The affection of love that is bestowed in the divine union of love is also divine, and consequently very spiritual, subtle, delicate, and interior, exceeding every affection and feeling of the will and every appetite. The will, as a result, must first be purged and annihilated of all its affections and feelings in order to experience and taste, through union of love, this divine affection and delight, which is so sublime and does not naturally belong to the will. The soul is left in a dryness and distress proportional to its habitual natural affections (whether for divine or human things), so that every kind of demon may be debilitated, dried up, and tried in the fire [Tb. 6:16-17], and the soul may become pure and simple, with a palate purged and healthy and ready to experience the sublime and marvelous touches of divine love. After the expulsion of all actual and habitual obstacles, it will behold itself transformed in these divine touches.⁶³³

⁶³² John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, in *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), bk. 2, chp. 9 (p. 413).

⁶³³ John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, bk. 2, chp. 9, (p.413).

Of course the experience of the dark night is one that no one really wants to endure, but John of the Cross sees it as an opportunity for the soul to turn to the Sacred and allow it to shed the obstacles that weigh it down and turn it away from the Sacred.

John mentions the mystical healing experience as one that exceeds the affections of the soul in this Earthly plane. The natural human element is not strong enough to produce the splendor and delights of the Sacred on its own. The delights will always come from the outside source of the Sacred.

4. Furthermore, in this union for which the dark night is a preparation, the soul in its communion with God must be endowed and filled with a certain glorious splendor embodying innumerable delights. These delights surpass all the abundance the soul can possess naturally, for nature, so weak and impure, cannot receive these delights, as Isaiah says: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered any human heart what [she or] he has prepared, etc. [Is. 64:4]. As a result the soul must first be set in emptiness and poverty of spirit and purged of every natural support, consolation, and apprehension, earthly and heavenly. Thus empty, it is truly poor in spirit and stripped of the old self, and thereby able to live that new and blessed life which is the state of union with God, attained by means of this night.⁶³⁴

The soul has to be purified in order to receive the good, healing presence of the Sacred.

The spiritual practices can also be seen as flow practices for John of the Cross as well. We know that as a discipline of abstinence according to Dallas Willard, solitude was practiced as John of the Cross sought reform of the church, turning the Carmelites into more of a contemplative order. The spiritual practice of silence can also be said to have been practiced as well. We know that study as a discipline of engagement and a flow practice was inherent to his seminary training. Richard Foster's inward discipline of meditation as a flow practice was definitely practiced by John as we can see in his writing. We also know that prayer and study were also practiced as mentioned above. The outward discipline of service was also well connected to his sense of mission for reform of the church.

⁶³⁴John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, bk. 2, chp. 9 (p. 413 – 414).

The Life of St. Faustina Kowalska

Faustina was born on August 25, 1905, in a village called Glogowiec near the city of Lodz in the heart of Poland. Glogowiec cannot be found on modern maps of Poland because it is now a part of Swinice Warkie.⁶³⁵

Faustina's father was Stanislaus Kowalski. He was born on May 6, 1868, in the Polish village of Swinice. Faustina's mother, Marianna Babel was born on March 8, 1875, in Mniewie, a village not far from Swinice. The two were married on October 28, 1892, and made the decision to settle in Glogowiec.⁶³⁶

Faustina's mother, Marianne gave birth to children only after nine years of marriage and many prayers. Faustina was the third of ten children (two of whom died in infancy) and her baptismal name was "Helena," which was given two days after her birth.⁶³⁷

Stanislaus was a carpenter by day and a farmer in the evenings and night, two jobs being a necessity to support his family of ten.⁶³⁸ Stanislaus was a devout soul; he would "rise very early and begin each day with the singing of the traditional Little Hours of the Immaculate Conception, popularly known as "Godzinki." During Lent he would substitute these prayers with the Lamentations of the Lord's Passion, called "Gorzkie Zale."⁶³⁹ Along with his influence on Faustina, her mother's compassionate disposition and her dedicated nature to both her

⁶³⁵ Sophia Michalenko, *The Life of Faustina Kowalska: The Authorized Biography* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1999), 13. The author only provides a general bibliography for primary sources at the end of the book and does not provide footnotes or endnotes in the text.

⁶³⁶ Michalenko, *The Life of Faustina Kowalska*, 13.

⁶³⁷ Michalenko, *The Life of Faustina Kowalska*, 14.

⁶³⁸ Michalenko, *The Life of Faustina Kowalska*, 15.

⁶³⁹ Michalenko, *The Life of Faustina Kowalska*, 15. The author only provides a general bibliography for primary sources at the end of the book and does not provide footnotes or endnotes in the text.

husband and her family made a big impact on the girl.⁶⁴⁰ “Every day she brought him a hot meal, no matter where he was working. Returning, she invariably carried a load of firewood on her back. Even during winter, with the snow up to her knees, the routine was the same.”⁶⁴¹

Faustina was a small child of unusual devotion. She both went to Confession and made her first Communion at the age of nine,⁶⁴² and subsequently went to Confession every week, beforehand kissing her parents’ hands and asking for their forgiveness too.⁶⁴³

Faustina began school only at the age of twelve for, because of Russia’s occupation of Poland, schools were closed. Faustina’s schooling came to an abrupt end after only two winters when officials decided that the school had to devote more of its space to the younger students.⁶⁴⁴

Faustina moved to Alexandrow in spring of 1921 to alleviate financial pressures at home by working as a maid and baby-sitter. She was well-liked by the family; they appreciated her cheerful disposition, excellent storytelling, and innate sense of nurturing.⁶⁴⁵ While working there, Faustina received the Sacrament of Confirmation at the hands of Bishop Vincent Tymieniecki.⁶⁴⁶

As she had earlier, Faustina found that she still had a deep yearning to become a nun. A year later, Faustina went back home to tell her parents, only to find that they ignored her whenever she spoke of the subject. She returned to work in 1922, this time with a family in the

⁶⁴⁰ George W. Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina: Herald of Divine Mercy* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2001), 21.

⁶⁴¹ Michalenko, *The Life of Faustina Kowalska*, 16.

⁶⁴² Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina*, 21.

⁶⁴³ Michalenko, *The Life of Faustina Kowalska*, 17.

⁶⁴⁴ Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina*, 21.

⁶⁴⁵ Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina*, 22.

⁶⁴⁶ Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diary of Saint Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul* (Stockbridge, Massachusetts: Marians of the Immaculate Conception, 2001), xxviii.

city of Lodz. As before, her employers were very pleased to have her. Faustina was able to deepen her prayer and fasting, showing God her increasing devotion.⁶⁴⁷

Finally in July of 1924, Faustina entered a convent in Warsaw run by the sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. To test her spirit and calling, she had to earn enough money to pay for her wardrobe.⁶⁴⁸ On August 1, 1925, the sisters of Our Lady of Mercy finally accepted her as a novice,⁶⁴⁹ and Sister Faustina subsequently made her perpetual vows on May 1, 1933, with Bishop Stanislaus Rospond celebrating.⁶⁵⁰ A year later, in July 1934, Faustina began writing a diary as instructed by Father Sopocko, her spiritual director. She titled it *Divine Mercy in My Soul*.⁶⁵¹

In August of 1934 Faustina experienced a severe asthma attack, most likely prompted by tuberculosis. She would suffer from tuberculosis for much of the short remainder of her life.⁶⁵² Due to the illness, Faustina stopped writing her diary in June of 1938. She died that October 5 of multiple tuberculosis in the city of Krakow, at thirty-three years of age.⁶⁵³

Faustina was beatified on April 18, 1933, in Rome on the Second Sunday of Easter, which is now the “Feast of Divine Mercy.”⁶⁵⁴ On April 30, 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized St. Faustina Kowalska and pronounced Divine Mercy Sunday as a day of celebration for the worldwide Church.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁴⁷ Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina*, 22.

⁶⁴⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, xxix.

⁶⁴⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, xxix.

⁶⁵⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, xxxiii – xxxiv.

⁶⁵¹ Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina*, 96.

⁶⁵² Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina*, 96.

⁶⁵³ Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina*, 98.

⁶⁵⁴ Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina*, 103.

⁶⁵⁵ Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina*, 104.

St. Faustina Kowalska's Suffering and Mystical Healing

It is thanks to Faustina's diary entitled *Divine Mercy in My Soul*⁶⁵⁶ that we have a record of her mystical relationship with God. Her journey with and in the love of Jesus was not without suffering by any means. Much of mystical experience is characterized by sudden change in condition, whether it be mental or physical. In Faustina's case, this positive change or healing is what allowed Faustina to continue the work of mercy that she was called to carry out.

In a sense, this work of mercy helped to heal not only Faustina, but all those who were and are touched by her story of suffering that turns into an example of love for humanity. As is often stated, God works in mysterious ways, and Faustina's story attests to that. Faustina is not only given the grace to be healed and for her suffering to be alleviated, but God gives her the wisdom to understand her own suffering and the suffering that Jesus went through on the cross.

Jesus brought Faustina to days so dark they are reminiscent of St. John of the Cross and the Dark Night of the Soul. Without warning, Faustina fell into a deep pit of despair. She was frightened beyond words and could not understand what was happening to her. Terror gripped Faustina as she struggled to gain some sense of relief, until she was mercifully gripped by "some force." She recalled:

24. One day, just as I had awakened, when I was putting myself in the presence of God, I was suddenly overwhelmed by despair. Complete darkness in the soul. I fought as best I could till noon. In the afternoon, truly deadly fears began to seize me; my physical strength began to leave me. I went quickly to my cell, fell on my knees before the Crucifix and began to cry out for mercy. But Jesus did not hear my cries. I felt my physical strength leave me completely. I fell to the ground, despair flooding my whole soul. I suffered terrible tortures in no way different from the torments of hell. I was in this state for three quarters of an hour. I wanted to go and see the Directress about it, but was too weak. I wanted to shout but I had no voice. ... Immediately some force raised me up from the ground and I stood up.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁶ Kosicki, *Meet Saint Faustina*, 96.

⁶⁵⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 13 – 14.

Faustina was healed by a merciful God. The horrible despair left her when she found herself in the hands of an unseen helper.

We next see the transformation of Faustina's spirit. Mary appeared to Faustina and answered her anguish when she revealed how greatly she was suffering. The mystical experience with Mary instantly strengthened her. Faustina was relieved to know that she was not suffering in isolation, but that Mary was aware of all that she was going through. This gave Faustina the courage to bring the message of mercy to a starving humanity.

25. During the night, the Mother of God visited me, holding the Infant Jesus in Her arms. My soul was filled with joy, and I said, "Mary, my Mother, do You know how terribly I suffer?" And the Mother of God answered me, *I know how much you suffer, but do not be afraid. I share with you your suffering, and I shall always do so.* She smiled warmly and disappeared. At once, strength and a great courage sprang up anew in my soul.⁶⁵⁸

Mary brought Faustina great relief and hope to carry on.

Next, Faustina explicitly spoke of her darkness, a darkness that had lasted for almost six months. The mystical experience and the presence of the Sacred had lifted the veil of darkness that she had carried for so long. She heard the words of the Sacred and carried the Holy Trinity deep in her heart. She was given the Divine Light of the Sacred and so after the event she carried it with her, sharing the Spirit and the Divine Light with those she encountered. She recounted:

27. [E]ven after the vows, darkness continued to reign in my soul for almost half a year. Once, when I was praying, Jesus pervaded all my soul, darkness melted away, and I heard these words within me: **You are My joy; you are My heart's delight.** From that moment I felt the Most Holy Trinity in my heart; that is to say, within myself. I felt that I was inundated with Divine light. Since then, my soul has been in intimate communion with God, like a child with its beloved Father.⁶⁵⁹

Jesus gives Faustina words of consolation that blotted out every ounce of darkness she was experiencing.

⁶⁵⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 14 – 15.

⁶⁵⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 15 – 16.

St. Faustina's experience of flow in the spiritual practices shows up as fasting in Dallas Willard's disciplines of abstinence. Fasting was one of the early devotions she practiced even before entering the convent when she was hired as a maid and babysitter in Lodz. Prayer was another flow and spiritual practice that she engaged in early on as well. Prayer falls under one of Dallas Willard's disciplines of engagement. Another discipline of engagement that Faustina practiced was the discipline of submission. It was in submission that Faustina would start her Diary of Mercy. Prayer and fasting both fall under Richard Foster's inward disciplines. Meditation was also practiced by St. Faustina and could be seen as a flow practice as well. Meditation falls under one of Foster's inward disciplines. Foster's outward disciplines of submission and service were experienced by Faustina in the directive of keeping a Diary and carrying out God's message of mercy to humanity. Faustina very actively received guidance from a spiritual director. Guidance is one of Foster's corporate disciplines.

The Life of Evelyn Underhill

Evelyn Underhill was born on December 6, 1875, in Wolverhampton, England. Her mother was Alice Lucy Ironmonger; her father, a barrister and lawyer, was subsequently knighted Sir Arthur Underhill.⁶⁶⁰ Her family did not have any interest in religion even though she was a baptized and confirmed in the Anglican Church.⁶⁶¹ Evelyn Underhill's interests included

⁶⁶⁰ Thomas S. Kepler, "Introduction: Life of Evelyn Underhill," in *The Evelyn Underhill Reader*, ed. Thomas S. Kepler (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 13.

⁶⁶¹ Susan Rakoczy, *Great Mystics and Social Justice: Walking on the Two Feet of Love* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 99.

“cats, sailing, bookbinding, archeology, bicycling, flowers, birds, and gardening.”⁶⁶² She married Hubert Stuart Moore, with whose family and hers would go sailing.⁶⁶³

There was a time in Evelyn’s life that she considered becoming a Roman Catholic. This was also at the time that she was engaged to be married. Hubert was against this because he felt that there would always be a priest in the confessional who could get in the way of their marriage. In her letter to Father Benson, the priest with whom she had been communicating her call to be a Catholic, she wrote, “He insists that all hope of our happiness is at an end, that he could never trust me, no more mutual confidence possible, that there will always be a priest between us.”⁶⁶⁴ She decided to wait for a year before joining the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁶⁵

Evelyn attended a private boarding school at Folkestone from the age of ten, so that would mean during the years of 1888-1891.⁶⁶⁶ Subsequently Evelyn became a student at

King’s College for women in London, where she spread her interests widely in studying languages, philosophy, history, botany, and social sciences. In 1928 she was made a Fellow of King’s College; and in 1938 Aberdeen University conferred upon her the degree of Doctor of Divinity...she became the only woman to be chosen by any Oxford college as an outside lecturer on religion.⁶⁶⁷

Evelyn Underhill was an accomplished scholar.

It was through the publication of her book *Mysticism* that she came to know Baron Friedrich von Hugel, who would later become her spiritual director. They remained friends for five years, till von Hugel’s death in 1925.⁶⁶⁸ Clearly, it was a deep friendship, for she wrote:

⁶⁶² Kepler, “Introduction,” 13.

⁶⁶³ Kepler, “Introduction,” 13.

⁶⁶⁴ Kepler, “Introduction,” 16.

⁶⁶⁵ Kepler, “Introduction,” 16.

⁶⁶⁶ Kepler, “Introduction,” 13.

⁶⁶⁷ Kepler, “Introduction,” 13.

⁶⁶⁸ Kepler, “Introduction,” 17.

“Under God, I owe him my whole spiritual life, and there would have been more of it than there is, if I had been more courageous and stern with myself, and followed his directions more thoroughly.”⁶⁶⁹ Evelyn was so very appreciative of his spiritual direction.

In Evelyn’s correspondence with von Hugel, we find evidence of four sources of spiritual development: “(1) Christocentric thinking as compared with theocentric thought; (2) the difficulty of becoming a practicing Roman Catholic; (3) the reality of the historical happenings of the New Testament; (4) the forming of a set of spiritual disciplines.”⁶⁷⁰

By 1921 Evelyn Underhill had become a full member of the Church of England, and in a letter to Dom John Chapman disclosed her feelings about it:⁶⁷¹ “The whole point to me is that our Lord has put me *here*, keeps on giving me more and more jobs to do for souls here, and has never given me orders to move. ... I know what the push of God is like, and should obey it if it came—at least I trust and believe so.”⁶⁷²

Evelyn Underhill died in 1941.⁶⁷³

Evelyn Underhill’s Suffering and Mystical Healing

Evelyn Underhill’s relationship with God was a source of healing through her mystical experiences. She had what has been called a disembodied spirituality, which means she was

⁶⁶⁹ Kepler, “Introduction,” 17.

⁶⁷⁰ Kepler, “Introduction,” 17.

⁶⁷¹ Kepler, “Introduction,” 19.

⁶⁷² Margaret Cropper, *Life of Evelyn Underhill* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958): 166, quoted in Thomas S. Kepler, ed. *The Evelyn Underhill Reader* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 19.

⁶⁷³ Rakoczy, *Great Mystics*, 99.

much more focused on thinking about God than on an embodied spirituality.⁶⁷⁴ Her book

Mysticism shows us the competing forces that presented themselves in her life:

for she espoused the radical superiority of the ‘emotive will’ over the ‘intellectual will’; the way of love over the way of knowledge; selflessness and giving over selfishness and acquiring; a moral way of goodness over an amoral stance of curiosity; union and therefore relationship over individuality; and fruitfulness and action in the world over a quietistic and passive stance disconnected from the world.⁶⁷⁵

Underhill strived for a spirituality that would bring her out of her head, and into her heart. The irony is that her book still contained an overtone of intellectualism and was individualistic in the sense that it supported individualism through the uncommon path of transcendence rather than embodiment of the spiritual and of the person in all its humanity.⁶⁷⁶ Underhill’s struggles and sufferings included that fact that, “While she desired love, she was still addicted to knowledge. While she needed relationship, she was treading a path very much on her own. While she espoused social justice, she was, at least up to this point in her life, still disconnected from the world’s pain.”⁶⁷⁷

It was through meeting Baron von Hugel that she began to heal and had one among many mystical experiences that assisted her through personal transformation. “Underhill started the process of letting go—of her individualism, of her disembodied spirituality, of her bias towards the intellect.”⁶⁷⁸ As she did so, Underhill had what have been described as “moments of blissful, selfless illumination,”⁶⁷⁹ moments that she described in her own words, for example:

⁶⁷⁴ Nadia Delicata, “Evelyn Underhill’s Quest for the Holy: A Lifetime Journey of Personal Transformation,” *Anglican Theological Review* 88, no. 4: 525.

⁶⁷⁵ Delicata, “Evelyn Underhill’s Quest,” 525.

⁶⁷⁶ Delicata, “Evelyn Underhill’s Quest,” 525.

⁶⁷⁷ Delicata, “Evelyn Underhill’s Quest,” 525.

⁶⁷⁸ Delicata, “Evelyn Underhill’s Quest,” 528.

⁶⁷⁹ Delicata, “Evelyn Underhill’s Quest,” 528.

Today my God and Joy I felt and knew Thee, Eternal, Unchanging, transfusing all things, and most wholly and perfectly given to us in Christ—our in-dwelling with Him a Total Surrender to Thee—Thyself in all, the one medium of our union—at Communion to find and love Thee in each soul to which Thou has given Thyself. To know and find Thee, actually and substantially, in all nations and races and persons--*this* nourishes and solves the intercession problem. “Not grace alone, nor us alone, but Thy Grace in us.” To *use* and cultivate it. I think the parable of the talents meant this. How far beyond anything one conceived the mysteries seem to stretch now. The more vivid the vision of Christ grows and the more insistent the demand for dedication, the more one can escape by this path from the maze of self-occupation. He draws and we run after.⁶⁸⁰

The healing, mystical experience that she describes only made her strive to be even closer to the Sacred.

We know that Evelyn Underhill had interests, which were cats, sailing, book-binding, archeology, bicycling, flowers, birds, and gardening. These are all activities that when engaged can bring about the flow experience and are healing. They contributed to Underhill’s healing and alleviated her suffering. We know that she received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Aberdeen University, so it is safe to say that she also engaged in the flow and spiritual practice of study, which is one of Dallas Willard’s disciplines of engagement. Her flow experience of study most likely contributed to healing and management of her trauma and suffering. Service also falls under the discipline of engagement and Underhill’s mission was to teach people about mysticism. Study also falls under Richard Foster’s inward disciplines along with meditation. Meditation had to have been one of the spiritual and flow practices that she engaged in because she wrote books that were on the topic of mysticism. Underhill’s spiritual practice of service falls under Foster’s outward disciplines. We know that her strong sense of social justice kept her mindful of the plight of the poor. The corporate discipline of guidance was certainly practiced

⁶⁸⁰ Dana Greene, ed. *Fragments From an Inner Life: The Notebooks of Evelyn Underhill* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1993): 39-40, quoted in Nadia Delicata, “Evelyn Underhill’s Quest for the Holy: A Lifetime Journey of Personal Transformation,” *Anglican Theological Review* 88, no. 4, Fall 2006: 528-529.

by Underhill as she received spiritual direction from Friedrich von Hugel. This relationship was very healing for Underhill and it is safe to say that the flow experience was present by way of her conversations and letters with von Hugel.

Comparing and Contrasting Elements

Elements of comparison and contrast are apparent in the above examples of four individuals whose mystical experiences assisted them in the healing process. Among the experiences that these four had in common was some form of training, whether it was from a religious community, convent, or university. All four of them also suffered and were comforted by the Sacred or an other-worldly representative. They all had determination to move forward in their lives no matter what happened to them. They all wrote about what they learned about the Sacred through their experience of suffering, and what it meant for them. All of these people knew a terrible loneliness. This was part of their isolation and suffering. Finally, they all struggled intensely with one aspect or another of their lives.

Elements of contrast include the fact that they had different missions in their lives. St. Therese of Lisieux's mission was to teach and stress simplicity in all things, obedience, and the representation of flowers. John of the Cross' mission was to be a writer and express himself through prose. Faustina Kowalska's mission was to spread the Divine Mercy message. Evelyn Underhill's mission was to study and teach others about mysticism. Other points of contrast include that they were all caught in some form of imprisonment at some point in their lives. Therese of Lisieux's prison was her mind. John of the Cross' prison was literal, as he was imprisoned and tortured. Faustina Kowalska's prison was of the malice that surrounded her at times in her community. Evelyn Underhill's prison was her intellectualism.

Conclusion

It is evident that despite the struggle for words to express what is felt through the mystical event, these four people at least were able to achieve that objective. Moreover, there are other people who have also experienced what the mystic is describing. So, the shared interest in mysticism can in part be because the reader is also identifying with the description thanks to his or her own experience of something similar.

Mystics are able to bring light to those they encounter in person and those they encounter as readers. Might it be because the mystics themselves have been touched by the healing grace of the Sacred through the mystical event? The mystical event does seem to evoke a sense of healing in one way or another, and that healing can extend itself to others through word or deed.

In this chapter I have shown that the effects of the mystical experience are healing in some way, as shown by the lives and writings of Evelyn Underhill, Bernard McGinn, and Rudolf Otto. I have shown that there are historic examples of people who have experienced what I describe as mystical experiences and who have been helped in the midst of their suffering as a result. My examples were St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill. I included case studies of these four mystics as sources of data. These case studies ultimately document how spiritual practices and the flow experience helped these mystics in their healing and recovery from trauma.

Chapter Five

Flow Practices and Healing from Trauma and Suffering

In this chapter, I will first show how the types of spiritual practices I am exploring induce flow and specifically how they induce flow in ways that seem promising for trauma survivors. Second, I will show how the practices I am exploring accomplish results similar to what trauma experts suggest are important to healing, and I will indicate the stage of healing for which those practices are particularly useful. Third and finally, I will also show how these practices seem similar to what I have observed in the four mystics whose lives and works were explored in the previous chapter.

Specified Spiritual Practices

This project began by showing how certain types of spiritual practices induce flow and can be used to manage and heal trauma. This research, in part, focused on a movement based practice of daily writing/journaling. The daily writing/journaling is part of a specific type of journaling exercise that Julia Cameron describes,⁶⁸¹ namely stream of consciousness writing. The other part of this research focuses on the spiritual formation practice of guided meditation in the form of light imagery accompanied by prayer/dialog with the Sacred. The light imagery guided meditation that I discuss comes partially from a grounding meditation.⁶⁸² The prayer/dialog with the Sacred will follow a specific form of prayer that is suggested in St. Faustina's *Diary*.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸¹ Cameron, *Artist's Way*, 9-18.

⁶⁸² Michele Cempaka, "Grounding, Cleansing, Protection and Meditation," Spirit Weaver Journeys, <http://spiritweaverjourneys.com/grounding-cleansing-protection-meditation/>, (accessed August 31, 2014).

⁶⁸³ Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diary*, 358.

These practices have the potential to induce the flow experience and in turn assist in the management and recovery from symptoms of trauma.

Julia Cameron refers to what she calls morning pages, which I describe loosely as writing/journaling. It is a writing practice in which a person engages every morning using longhand writing. For three pages, the person writes their stream of consciousness. Whatever comes to mind is worthy of putting on paper. The pages can contain frustration over not knowing what to write next, or over nothing to write at all. It is impossible to do anything wrong in these morning pages; as a thought enters the mind, it is put on paper.⁶⁸⁴

Cameron suggests that such morning pages can help a person heal from creative issues they may have acquired along the way of life. The morning pages do away with the jumble of our minds and lives, making space once again for creativity.⁶⁸⁵

The spiritual formation practices I have chosen to study in this project are two: a guided meditation in the form of light imagery, and, concurrently, prayer/dialog with the Sacred based on a grounding meditation.⁶⁸⁶ The prayer/dialog with the Sacred follows a specific form of prayer that is suggested in St. Faustina's Diary.⁶⁸⁷

The light imagery meditation follows:

Sit in a comfortable position with your feet flat on the ground. Close your eyes. Imagine that there is a white light circling your feet. Feel the tingling sensation on your feet. Now

⁶⁸⁴ Cameron, *Artist's Way*, 9-10.

⁶⁸⁵ Cameron, *Artist's Way*, 11.

⁶⁸⁶ Cempaka, "Grounding."

⁶⁸⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 358.

the white light is encircling your calves and your feet. Feel the tingling sensation on your calves and feet. Feel the light as it twirls around your feet and calves.

Now imagine the light is twirling around your thighs. Feel the tingling sensation on your thighs. The light is twirling, twirling around your feet, calves, and thighs. Now imagine the light is circling your waist. Twirling, twirling, and twirling. Feel the tingling sensation. Now the light is encircling your feet, legs, and waist like a cocoon.

The light is safe and not too cold or too warm. It is just right. The light is twirling and twirling. Now imagine the light is circling your chest. Twirling and twirling. Feel the tingling sensation around your chest. You are in a cocoon that is safe and warm. Feel the tingling sensation from your feet to your chest now. Twirling and twirling. Now the light is encircling your hands and arms. Twirling and twirling. Feel the tingling of the light that is safe and warm. Twirling and twirling.

Now feel the light circling your head. Twirling and twirling. Feel the tingling sensation of the light. Twirling and twirling. You are now fully covered in the light. You are warm and safe. The light is twirling and twirling all around you. You feel the tingling sensation of the light throughout your body. You are encircled completely like a cocoon. The light is twirling and twirling around you. Now hold the light encircling you as you feel safe and warm. Feel the tingling of the light as it twirls and twirls. You are safe in the light.

Now imagine that the light is going back into the ground slowly, from your feet, your legs, your waist, your chest, your hands, your arms, and your head.

And now you can open your eyes.

Prayer/dialog with the Sacred is how Jesus taught Faustina to converse with Him. Jesus was concerned and wondered why it was that Faustina did not tell Him about the small things as well as the big things that happened to her. Jesus told her that it would bring Him immense joy to hear about everything. Her response to Him was that He already knows everything about everything that happens. His response to her was that she should approach Him like a child, and let Him know all that concerns her. He assured her that His heart and listening ears are intent on listening to her every word, and how dear each and every word of hers is to Him.⁶⁸⁸

So it is that in this fashion the devoted heart corresponds with Jesus. Tell Jesus about everything that is happening in your life. Talk to Jesus as if you are talking to a best friend, and leave nothing out. Tell Jesus about the dishes you had to do the other day and how you dreaded it. Tell Jesus about the good and bad things that happened to you in your childhood. Tell Jesus about the conversation you had with your mother or father the other day and how it made you feel. Tell Jesus about that piece of lint you picked off your shirt the other day, only to find that the piece of lint that you picked off ended up turning into half a foot. Tell Jesus about the temperature in the room or church where you are talking to Him now.

⁶⁸⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 358.

So while she is engaging in the light imagery meditation, the individual is also having this dialog with the Sacred. The two are happening at the same time. While it might seem intense to some readers, this form of meditation and prayer has the potential to aid in the healing and alleviation of the symptoms of trauma. Daily stream of consciousness writing can also aid in the alleviation and healing of symptoms of trauma.

How the Spiritual Practices of Writing/Journaling and Light Imagery/Dialog With the Sacred Induce the Flow Experience

To recap, we will briefly explore the components of the experience of flow. In flow, a person's skills are high enough to meet presented challenges in which there are goals, rules, and immediate feedback regarding how well a person is progressing with the activity. The level of concentration is so high when engaged in the activity that there is no opportunity to think about anything else, including worrisome thoughts. A person's self-consciousness is suspended. Time stands still, and is altered. There is so much satisfaction in engagement with the activity that a person does so for the sake of the activity itself. This can happen to the extent that the activity has an element of danger or difficulty.⁶⁸⁹

Regarding the task of writing/journaling, a person's skills must be sufficiently advanced to meet the challenges of the act of writing. If a person has the ability to write longhand, their skill of writing meets the challenge of putting their thoughts on paper using a writing utensil. The goals, rules, and immediate feedback for this activity are that three pages must be written, that there is no limitation of the subject matter, and that immediate feedback is visible every time a word is written on paper. In the activity of writing/journaling, concentration is so high that one's only aim is to put words on paper to describe a thought, feeling, or situation. A person is focused

⁶⁸⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 71.

only on description, pen, and paper. If the person is experiencing worrisome thoughts or situations, these begin to lose their hold on the person as those thoughts are put in writing and they are no longer trapped in the mind. Self-consciousness is suspended as the person becomes absorbed in their writing/journaling. Writing down one's thoughts and possible worries shift: one no longer feels so vulnerable to the outside world or to one's whirling thoughts, because they are now set down on paper, out in the open. Consequently, the self relaxes. Time is suspended; only when the person reaches for their hot cup of tea do they realize that time has flown by and the tea is now lukewarm. The motivation for writing/journaling becomes rewarding in and of itself; every single word that makes it to the paper is a reward. The compilation of a few choice words to evoke a thought becomes a thing of beauty. And even if the words are in basic, ordinary language or style, they seem like jewels because they are no longer inside of us, but have become a creation that exists in the world beyond our own tumultuous minds. The act of writing them down seems like a victory, for they are no longer festering (if negative) or simply existing in our minds. They become holy no matter how unholy they seem, because our bodies are God's temple, and we all carry that holiness with us as God's creatures.

In terms of light imagery/dialog with the Sacred, a person's skills are sufficient to meet presented challenges when they are able to imagine, or use their imagination, and dialog with the Sacred as if they are talking to their best friend. The goal is to remain in this meditative state for as long as it takes to complete the dialog and to remain in the state of the light imagery at the same time. The rules for this activity are those specific parameters given for the light imagery portion as well as the form of prayer, that is, to have a dialog with the Sacred as you would with your best friend. Immediate feedback (in the form of the response in the dialog) measures the progression of the activity, as does successfully engaging in the meditation with light and being

able to hold the image. Each time one is able to dialog with the Sacred and meditate concurrently, a measure of progress is achieved. Once an individual progresses far enough into the exercise, there is no room in the mind for anything else. And if a stray thought or idea does come to mind when engaging in the activity, it is permitted because the person is bringing it to the hands of a loving, compassionate God. Consciousness of the self is suspended, as the individual becomes absorbed in the warmth and love that surrounds them in the form of light in this meditation. All that exists for the individual are the words silently “spoken” in dialog and being surrounded by light. Time becomes altered in this activity when the person has silently said all that they need to say to the Sacred. Twenty or thirty minutes may pass without a person noticing. Time stands still. Often the person engaging in the light imagery and dialog with the Sacred feels so much satisfaction and peace that she wants to do it for the beautiful experience in and of itself. One knows deep down that one has spoken to the same Sacred One who is the author of the heavens and of the earth. And the physical sensation of the light as it twirls all around one, leaving one feeling warm and safe, is an experience that makes one want to return to that space again and again.

How the Spiritual Practices are Healing and at What Stage of Healing According to Trauma Experts

Next, I show how the practices I am exploring accomplish results similar to what the trauma experts suggest are important to healing, and at what stage of healing they have that effect. Judith Herman suggests that healing can happen in relationship with others and empowerment for the victim is also the key to healing. Working with these two components of healing symptoms of trauma, the therapist can lead the client in the meditation/prayer exercise

until the client can do it alone. The client can share with the therapist topics that come up for them as they do their writing/journaling.

Herman suggests three stages in the recovery process. The first stage is the establishment of safety, the second stage is remembrance and mourning, and the third and final stage is reconnection with ordinary life. The stages need not happen linearly. Regarding the first stage of establishing safety, the prayer/meditation exercise can help achieve this as a person visualizes that she is surrounded by the light that is warm and safe. Writing/journaling can facilitate the second stage of recovery as remembrance and mourning. The traumatizing event and the symptoms associated with trauma can be dealt with in a healthy way through the act of writing/journaling. In the remembrance and mourning stage of recovery, the meditation on light and prayer can be useful for it reminds the client that she is safe in her own body and company. And as the client engages in a dialog with the Sacred, the dialog could include remembering the incident as well as bringing those memories to the present as the client articulates the process of dealing with the events of the past and how much the symptoms of trauma have been alleviated. In reconnection, the third and final stage of recovery, writing/journaling can be utilized to help maintain a sense of recovery. By now, the client's sense of agency is reclaimed. The mediation on light and prayer can be an ongoing practice that can aid a person in living even after recovery is established.

Levine reminds us that some sufferers feel very divorced from their bodies following a traumatic experience. Often they feel numb and disassociated. There are exercises that can help alleviate this numbness. For example, Levine suggests that client stand rather than sit during a session or balance on a gym ball as a way of becoming more constantly aware of the changes in his or her body. Levine also teaches body awareness by using what he calls assertion and

aggression management. This is where the client stands and slowly shifts her weight from side to side. As she does, the therapist guides her in being conscious of her body, starting at the ankles, and moving up their calves and thighs all the way up to their heads. These body awareness exercises are similar to the combined light imagery/dialog with the Sacred practice. In this practice, as a person begins the light imagery meditation, she begins to imagine that there is light surrounding her feet, then ankles, legs, waist, chest, then head, and ultimately her entire body.

Lee and James suggest that to have a compassionate mind is one way to heal. The components of a compassionate mind are motivation, attention/imagery, thinking/reasoning, imagery, behavior, and emotions. The two components on which I concentrate here are compassionate images and compassionate emotions. Compassionate images are images that are encouraging, supportive, kind, and understanding. Such images trigger healing movement within us. Compassionate emotions are of warmth, support, validation, encouragement, and kindness. Together, compassionate images and compassionate emotions are similar to the light imagery/dialog with the Sacred exercise, as in both there is safety and warmth in the light, along with support, validation, and encouragement.

Van der Kolk suggests that trauma often robs a person of his sense of agency. In recovery, a person repossesses his body and mind. When he does this, he accepts what has been known and the physical sensations that come along with it. The way to heal, as van der Kolk suggests, starts with (1) discovering what makes us calm and gives us the ability to focus; (2) learning how to keep our sense of calm when faced with things that tend to make one remember the traumatizing experience, things such as sensations, images, sounds, or thoughts; (3) being in the now and engaging with others; (4) refusing to keep secrets. This latter step includes secrets about how one has found a way to survive and live with the trauma. The two stages that highlight

the healing practices of the light meditation and dialog with the Sacred are stages one and two. The meditation and dialog with the Sacred have the potential to create a calm space while remaining focused on the exercise, as in stage one. The sufferer is safe and warm in the light. She is also engaging with a loving presence in the Sacred. The meditation and dialog with the Sacred can also assist in the healing process. In the light meditation and dialog with the Sacred, a person can concentrate on images and sensations that are positive, such as light and warmth. Tingling sensations of light and warmth can also be healing. These exercises help bring people to reconnect with their bodies in a safe and healthy way.

How the Specified Spiritual Practices Are Similar to the Types of Practices Utilized by St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill

Finally, I show how these practices seem similar to what I observed in the mystics I studied, namely St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill. St. Therese of Lisieux suffered from severe anxiety coupled with grief at the death of her mother. Her sisters took care of her, but Therese experienced loss again when her sister Pauline entered the convent. It was then that she began to experience tremors, delusions, and incapacitation. Therese later also experienced propulsive seizures and threw herself at the floor, among other episodes. This lasted approximately six weeks. It was at the time that two of her sisters were taking care of her that she had a healing experience through Our Lady. She was crying for her sister, Marie, when Marie stepped out and Therese was taken care of by her other sister, Leonie. Therese cried out for Marie so loudly that Marie came running back in from the garden. Even when Marie had returned, Therese did not recognize her. Marie, along with her sisters Leonie and Celine, knelt down facing Our Lady's statue, and began to pray for Therese. Therese also faced Our Lady and began to pray. In her prayer she asked for pity from the Virgin

Mary. Then Therese suddenly received a vision of the Virgin Mary smiling at her with kindness. Her sister, Marie witnessed as Therese fixed her gaze on Mary, then grew calm, and then quietly began to cry. Therese's symptoms disappeared. Therese's prayer is similar to the dialog with the Sacred part of the exercise in that she held a dialog with her Mother Mary. The result of her prayer and dialog was a vision of Mary and a feeling of calm, which broke the hold of the intense anxiety from which she had suffered, resulting in healing.

St. John of the Cross captured his own suffering and healing in his work, *The Dark Night*. *The Dark Night* is written in the form of a poem. In it, John expresses the dark night as suffering. There is pain in what is lacking, and what is lacking includes intellect, love, and memory. This pain and lack were tormenting John's spirit, causing him what felt like never-ending suffering. When a person feels this way, it seems as if people who reach out to them cannot get through, leaving the would-be helper at a loss and the sufferer feeling as though God has forsaken them. This is the worst of the suffering for the person loves God so much, yet feels God's absence. John suggests that relief from such suffering can come through contemplation, which is a sense of the soul being inundated by God. It is a knowledge based on love without limits. In contemplation, there are no images or concepts, just God's love. This knowledge purifies and lights up the soul. John uses the term "contemplation" to refer to God as an infinite One who cannot be contained. Here, John refers to God's totality.

John knows the dark night because he himself has gone through it. He has learned that his suffering has been healed through mystical experience. Because of his healing, John came to understand that the dark night has a place in purification. The dark night puts a person in a place where God can heal him and simultaneously strengthen his relationship with God.

John also speaks of love and union with the Sacred, and the need for suffering and dryness so that the soul can truly grasp love and union with the Sacred. This love and union is healing for the soul. Of course, nobody wants to have the experience of the dark night. But John sees it as an opportunity for the soul to call upon the Sacred and push the soul to let go of all that makes it deviate from the Sacred.

John sees the healing experience as one that is way beyond what any soul could imagine on Earth. Humans on their own are not naturally able to produce the splendor and delights of the One. Those delights will always come from outside of us, as the Sacred is outside of us. The soul must bear the process of purification to be able to receive the Sacred's healing presence.

John's description of healing and recovery from the dark night are similar to the practices of prayer in the form of turning to the Sacred and the physical, bodily sensation of the light meditation, and writing/journaling. He speaks of the suffering and dryness that come with this dark night. A soul turns to the Sacred in the engagement of dialog and meditation on light and receives healing. The physical, bodily healing sensation of the light meditation is evident in words John uses, such as love and union. When a person experiences love and union with God, if and when the intellect is healed, often the body is also healed and able to experience a profound sense of calm. That sense of calm is in very obvious contrast to the earlier sadness, fear, and anxiety. John also uses writing/journaling as a part of the healing process; indeed, *The Dark Night* was itself written as a poem. John was able to process what he was experiencing through writing.

St. Faustina's suffering is so great that it is similar to St. John of the Cross and the Dark Night of the Soul. Faustina suddenly fell into deep despair. She had no words for the fright she felt, and was confused by all that was happening. Terror grabbed hold of Faustina as she

struggled to move past her predicament. Faustina fell before the Crucifix, and cried for mercy. She felt as though Jesus did not hear her crying out and she became enveloped by fear. Finally, a force gripped her and raised her from the ground.

In her suffering, Faustina appealed to Mary about how much she was suffering. Mary appeared to her and in an instant strengthened Faustina by her presence. Mary's loving presence strengthened and healed Faustina. She found relief in the knowledge that she was not alone in her suffering. Mary revealed to Faustina that she is aware of her suffering. This helped Faustina carry out the message of mercy. This is similar to the prayer/dialog with the Sacred in that Faustina calls on Mary and tells her of the suffering that she feels. Faustina is reassured by Mary's knowledge of her suffering.

Faustina explicitly says that she is in darkness and that the darkness was with her for almost six months. Then one day when she was praying, the presence of the Sacred lifted her darkness. She heard the words of the Sacred and carried the Holy Trinity in her heart. This is similar to dialog with the Sacred in her prayer. She communicates with the Sacred and the Sacred answers her, and takes away her darkness. She feels the Most Holy Trinity within her, and she is full of Divine Light.

Evelyn Underhill's suffering included having a desire for love, yet being very addicted to knowledge. Relationship was what she needed in life, yet she was carving out a life very much alone. Social justice is what she had a heart for, yet she was not connected to the ills of the world. It was when she met Baron von Hugel that she was able to begin the healing process. Underhill described her healing as blissful and luminous. Her relationship with the Sacred helped her heal. This is similar to dialog with the Sacred and feeling God's healing presence in the meditation on light.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the spiritual practices of writing/journaling and prayer/meditation induce flow in ways that support healing and alleviate symptoms of trauma. Second, I have shown how these practices are similar to what the trauma experts suggest are important for healing and at what stage of healing they are best introduced. Third and finally, I have shown how these practices are similar to what I observed in the mystics I have studied.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Spiritual formation practices in the form of prayer, movement-based practices in terms of daily writing/journaling, and meditative practices in the form of light imagery that produce the psychological condition called ‘flow’ contribute to the management and alleviation of symptoms related to trauma, specifically post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I supported this statement in the first part of Chapter One by providing a description, symptoms, and ways to heal from PTSD. Prominent figures included Judith Herman, Peter A. Levine, Deborah A. Lee and Sophie James, Bessel van der Kolk, and Laurel Parnell. Judith Herman describes complex post traumatic stress disorder as something that happens to those who suffered from repeated trauma for an extensive period of time.⁶⁹⁰ Deborah A. Lee and Sophie James suggest that some effects of trauma are anger, shame, isolation, questioning beliefs in a higher power, lack of hope for the future, and dissociation.⁶⁹¹ For healing from trauma Levine suggests centered awareness exercises where clients can learn to be more conscious of their bodies to help to connect the divide between the mind and body in the aftermath of trauma.⁶⁹² According to Bessel van der Kolk, there are six options that people have to choose from in their healing from trauma. They are EMDR, or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, yoga, self-leadership, creating structures, neurofeedback, and communal rhythms along with theater.⁶⁹³ Laurel Parnell suggests

⁶⁹⁰ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 119.

⁶⁹¹ Lee and James, *Compassionate-Mind*, 12-13.

⁶⁹² Levine, *Unspoken*, 117.

⁶⁹³ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 248.

that tapping, a form of EMDR, can be used to heal from trauma.⁶⁹⁴ In Chapter One I also included a literature review drawing from various authors.

Chapter Two concentrated on flow and trauma. One of the many psychological aspects of flow is that it assists in counteracting what is called psychic entropy. Psychic entropy is that state in which people experience disappointment, frustration, and angst, to name but a few.⁶⁹⁵ Flow occurs when a person's skills are high enough to meet presented challenges in which there are goals, rules, and immediate feedback regarding how well a person is progressing with the activity. The level of concentration is so high when engaged in the activity that there is no opportunity to think about anything else, including worrisome thoughts. A person's self-consciousness is suspended. Time stands still, and is altered. There is so much satisfaction in engagement with the activity that a person does so for the sake of the activity itself. This can happen to the extent that the activity has an element of danger or difficulty.⁶⁹⁶ Some of the fruits of flow are improved mental health, blossoming of creative abilities, and the motivation to do your best in whatever activity you choose to engage in, among other things.⁶⁹⁷ Flow can help a person heal amidst trauma.⁶⁹⁸ Flow can also assist healing in the aftermath of trauma.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁴ Parnell, *Tapping*, 30.

⁶⁹⁵ Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 22.

⁶⁹⁶ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 71.

⁶⁹⁷ Csikszentmihalyi, *Evolving*, 192-193.

⁶⁹⁸ Logan, "Flow Experience," 82.

⁶⁹⁹ Metzl, "Role," 113.

Chapter Three described spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual practices. Mel Lawrenz holds that we are continually formed by God.⁷⁰⁰ Maxie Dunnam suggests that to be a Christian is to know that Christ is alive and in each and every one of us.⁷⁰¹ Roger Gottlieb suggests that the key to spirituality is to pursue what he calls the spiritual virtues.⁷⁰² Michael Downey considers spirituality to be the agent that encompasses all wholeness of the human person through Christ.⁷⁰³ Michael Cox identifies Christian spirituality in terms of mysticism as the experience of encountering the Sacred.⁷⁰⁴ Dallas Willard breaks down important practices of living the spiritual life in terms of disciplines. There are the disciplines of abstinence and the disciplines of engagement. Under the disciplines of abstinence, you will find solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice. Under the disciplines of engagement, there is study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission.⁷⁰⁵ For Richard Foster, important practices for the spiritual life are broken down to three categories. First, they are the inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. The next category is the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. The final category is of the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.⁷⁰⁶ Teresa Blythe suggests that there are an abundance and variety of ways that people can pray and shares the prayer practices of a distinct set of customs. Mary Jo Barrett describes methods for healing using

⁷⁰⁰ Lawrenz, *Dynamics*, 15.

⁷⁰¹ Dunnam, *Alive*, 13.

⁷⁰² Gottlieb, *Spirituality*, 8-9.

⁷⁰³ Downey, *Understanding*, 49.

⁷⁰⁴ Cox, *Handbook*, 14.

⁷⁰⁵ Willard, *Spirit*, 158.

⁷⁰⁶ Foster, *Celebration*, 13-66, 69-122, 125-171.

spiritual practices. Linda Mayorga Miller, et al. document the role of scared objects in healing or surviving life's trials.

Chapter Four focused on mysticism as a source of healing for four mystics of the church. They are St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill. This case study supports the idea that the flow experience of writing/journaling and prayer/meditation can assist in the healing of their trauma. I begin with the nature of mystical experience in the eyes of Evelyn Underhill, Bernard McGinn, and Rudolf Otto. I define mysticism as the event for which there exists a recognizable and palpable change in consciousness with the Sacred that can yield both positive and terrifying results. Some comparing and contrasting points for St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill begin with the comparison that they all had some formal training of one sort or another, whether it is from a religious community, convent, or university. They all wrote about what they learned about the Sacred through their experience of suffering, and what it meant for them. An element of contrast is the fact that they were all caught in some form of imprisonment at some point in their lives. Therese of Lisieux's prison was her mind. John of the Cross' prison was literal, as he was imprisoned and tortured. Faustina Kowalska's prison was of the malice that surrounded her at times in her community. Evelyn Underhill's prison was her intellectualism.

Chapter Five included flow practices and what it means to heal from trauma and suffering. In this chapter I cover the specific spiritual practices of writing/journaling and prayer/meditation. I described these practices in detail, helping the reader understand the direction of the practices. I continued with an explanation of how it is that the specified spiritual practices induce the flow experience. Next, I clarified how the spiritual practices can help the

healing process and at what stage of healing in accord with what the trauma experts have suggested. Finally, I showed how the specified spiritual practices are similar to the types of practices that St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Faustina Kowalska, and Evelyn Underhill utilized.

While doing this research, some questions came to mind. One must wonder if the flow and spiritual practices of writing/journaling and prayer/meditation might be more easily engaged upon by introverts. How much does personality or temperance of a person matter? Are highly sensitive people, as Elaine Aron suggests, more prone to mystical experiences? What is the correlation between trauma and the spiritual life? Are those who have been traumatized also somehow opened up to the spiritual world because of their trauma? The meditation has the potential to introduce a person to healing their physical bodies with energy in terms of how to move or circulate it to those parts of the body where there is pain or energy that is stuck. Other ways a person can heal from trauma and anxiety that were not included in this dissertation are through the use of Energy Medicine as suggested by Donna Eden and through eating specific foods that have healing properties and supplements that Anthony William, Medical Medium suggests. Problems with these practices include the difficulty it is to find morning time to engage in the writing/journaling. We live in a time and society where it is difficult to find time to engage in such activities. And it is difficult to make the choice between waking up at an earlier time, or getting more sleep when much of the population already deals with insomnia or some other sort of sleep disturbance. Another problem is related to the prayer/meditation practice. If there is an issue with safety in terms of home environment or the fact of not having a home, the exercise might be difficult to do for someone if they wanted to close their eyes.

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